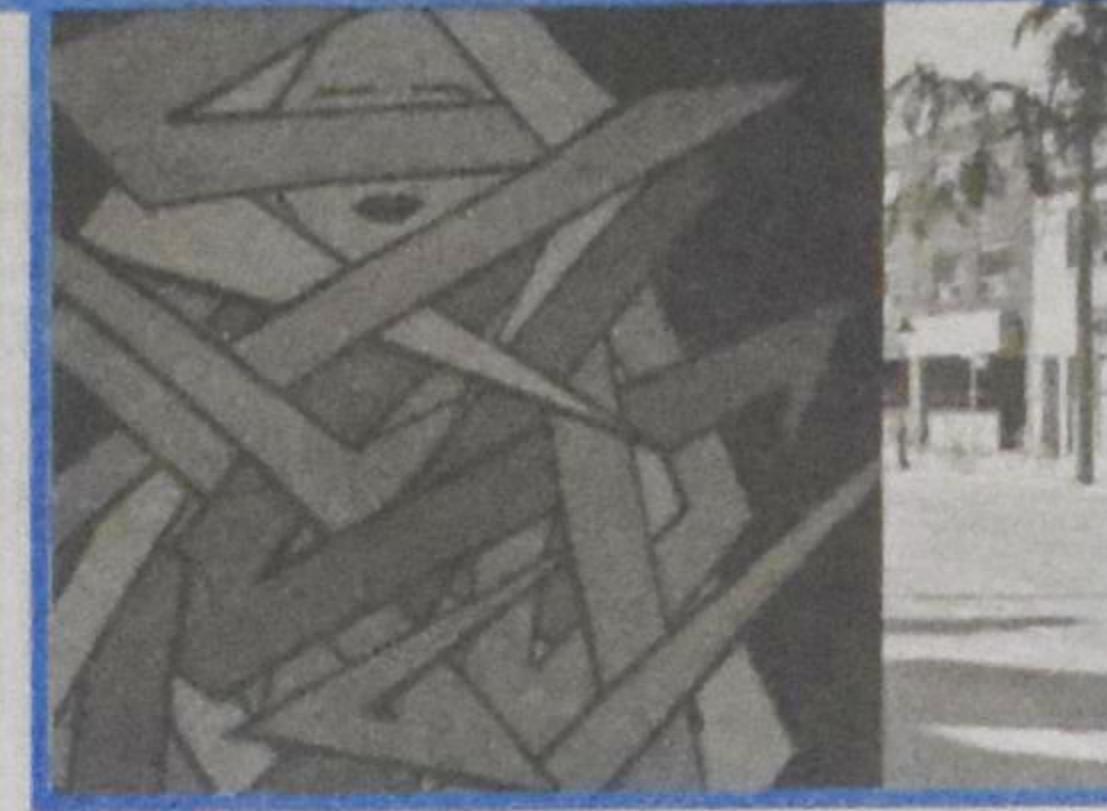




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CHRISTIAN COURIER

President Obama embarks on a second term

Mike Wevers

Americans recently celebrated their Thanksgiving. They could give thanks for the blessings their nation has experienced, including another exercise in democracy, which seems to galvanize their grass roots into political action that is unequalled in world politics. Americans also enjoyed leadership debates that Canadian politicians could do well to emulate. And they pulled off this election even though one of the most populous areas of the country was still reeling from the effects of Superstorm Sandy.

Election of the status quo

... [W]e are greater than the sum of our individual ambitions and we remain more than a collection of red states and blue states.

We are, and forever will be, the United States of America.

These words resounded in President Obama's victory speech to avid Democrat supporters. The national election map, however, displayed a different picture. Romney's 24 Republican states cut a red swath up from Texas through America's midwest and stretched out to the southeast, encircled by Obama's 26 west and northeast coast Democrat blue states. If the long awaited results from Florida had gone Republican, Romney would have won half of the states. Even with that state, and nearly half of the popular vote, Romney would not have had enough electoral college votes to win the Presidency.

The American presidential selection process attempts to reflect

that nation's origin as a federation of states. Consequently, the President is not directly elected by the populace. Instead, the President is chosen by electors who meet in December in each state, where the state electors are pledged to a Presidential candidate based on who won the state. The number of electors in each state is equal to the number of representatives and senators that state has in the U.S. Congress.

Going into election day, most pundits had Obama well ahead in the electoral college race, with solid Democrat blue states giving him 237 electors. Romney only had 191 electors in solid Republican red states. Romney faced the unlikely task of capturing a majority of the nine swing states which



A California man reflected in the image of a flag while voting.

would determine victory. He was only able to win one, North Carolina, and stole one from the blue column, Indiana. He did not even gain Wisconsin, the home state of his vice presidential running mate.

The Republicans can take solace in having maintained control of the House of Representatives in Congress, but they did lose two Senate seats, thereby strengthen-

ing Democrat control there. After all that campaigning and money spent, Capitol Hill in Washington remained virtually unchanged.

Whither Republican Presidential aspirations?

How can the Republican Party hope to regain the Presidential office in four years? It may simply

See Obama on p. 2

Working poor on the rise in Canada

A newly formed All-Party, Anti-Poverty Caucus fights to reduce poverty among low-income workers

Brad Wassink

It is often said that "the best social program is a job." It's a politically charged statement that elicits strong reactions from people of all stripes. However, for more and more people it is simply untrue. The working poor in Canada face the confounding reality that a job is insufficient to escape poverty. Their stories challenge our assumptions of what leads someone into, and out of, poverty.

At the start of each month, Statistics Canada releases its jobs report, including the all-important unemployment rate. But simply



Secondhand stores like Goodwill report an increase in customers since the recession.

looking at monthly fluctuations in unemployment truly misses the forest for the trees. In our Poverty Trends Scorecard – Canada 2012, Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) reports that a full 40 percent of poor households have one person working, and a shocking 12 percent have two or more people working. Clearly, the unemployment rate fails to tell the whole story when it ignores the large numbers of working poor in Canada.

We define the working poor as those adults under 65 who are engaged in employment and earn more than \$3,000 per year but

still fall below the poverty line. The rise of the working poor both before and since the recession is attributed to increases in "precarious" work: low-wage or part-time jobs, as well as jobs with variable hours and no benefits or pensions. Precarious jobs now make up one third of the labour force.

As our labour force becomes progressively precarious, there is a shortage of quality jobs that pay a decent wage or provide enough hours for people to live in dignity. When the recession hit in 2008, full-time employment in

See Working Poor on p. 2

News

Obama *continued*

be a matter of finding the right person to run against the leader of the Democrats in 2016. However, there seem to be more deep-seated problems than just choosing the right person. In that case, the Republican Party need look no further than north to Canada for some direction.

Prime Minister Harper was able to lead successive minority governments and then to forge a majority by focusing on conservative economic principles. He was ruthless in dealing with his members on conservative social issues. As a prime example, the Conservative Party has consistently steered away from changing the status quo on abortion in Canada even though many members of the Conservative caucus are pro-life. While many Americans can accept that the Republican Party could represent a pro-life view, the majority were put off, to say the least, by retrenchment on women's reproductive health issues. The Republicans' all-out assault on "Obamacare" also failed to resonate with voters outside of the party faithful.

The fiscal cliff

The unwelcome consequence of winning the White House race is that the President gets to face leftover business from 2011's debt ceiling minefield. To get approval for more borrowing room, a deal was struck to implement immediate cuts to the U.S. federal budget and a bipartisan process was put in place to develop a plan by January 2013 for another \$1.2 trillion in deficit reduction over the next decade. Without an approved plan, automatic decreases (budget sequestration) will be implemented to achieve the total reduction.

To achieve an annual budget reduction of \$109 billion, the sequestration is a pretty blunt instrument, a seldom used tool that is loved by budget bureaucrats who like to



emasculate politicians. It would take nearly 10 percent from defense allocations, or some \$55 billion per year, two percent from Medicare, or \$11 billion a year, with an approximate eight percent cut to all other programs to achieve \$43 billion dollars in savings. The big defense cut was something of a "poison pill" to get legislators to act. No party wants that magnitude of cuts to defense, particularly those Congressional representatives who host army, navy or air force bases and defense contractors in their states, where such cuts will put many jobs in jeopardy.

While post-election rhetoric indicated that the Democrats and Republicans got the message from the electorate that compromise was necessary, no agreement was in sight on tax changes which could avoid some of the spending cuts. Bush-era tax cuts are also slated to expire which, among others, will negatively affect middle class families, a group both parties say they want to protect.

President Obama continues to press to increase taxes on

the rich, putting himself in that category of Americans who earn more than \$250,000 a year. However, the Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives John Boehner, resists tax increases, even though he's willing to negotiate on changes to the tax code to close loopholes.

Canada has some interest as to how this Congressional stalemate is resolved. Economists are suggesting that if changes are not made to the budget sequestration cuts or the end of Bush tax cuts, the U.S. economy could move into recession. The Canadian economy, which is still very dependent on exports to the U.S., could be chilled and slow down too, putting Canadians out of work.

Giving thanks for a second term

President Obama will most assuredly have given thanks for his re-election to the most difficult office in the world when he sat down with his family Thanksgiving Day. It is an office which controls what is still the most powerful military on earth, but whose executive power is purposely circumscribed by Congress. Not only does he have to act on challenging domestic issues, he still faces a Middle East where the Syrian civil war is watched by a concerned Israel, already made nervous by Iran's nuclear power aspirations. As he begins his second term, President Obama's desire to move forward and fulfill the hoped-for change he instilled in his first campaign will be challenged by recently reestablished Congressional gridlock and a world still not at peace.

Mike Wevers, a retired senior budget advisor from the Alberta Government, will continue to watch with interest how the budget sequestration drama unfolds for our southern neighbour.



Working poor *continued*



One third of Canada's labour force is made up of low-wage or part-time workers.



All-Party Anti-Poverty Caucus has four priorities.



Canada fell by 2.5 percent. However, part-time work continued its steady climb, as if oblivious to (or perhaps buoyed by) the economic turmoil of the time. Employers, in an effort to keep costs low, are increasingly relying on a "disposable" workforce. Since the recession, 80 percent of the new jobs that have been created are temporary or contract work. It's not hard to understand why, since employees of temp agencies make only 40 percent of the wage of permanent employees, and hiring contract workers enables companies to pay below minimum wage. In other words, it's clear that there is such thing as a "bad job;" our job market is full of them.

Non-partisan solutions

This is a complex problem that our federal government needs to address. Simply implementing the Conservative's

policies aimed at creating more jobs won't help if these jobs are just as precarious. Beefing up employment insurance, as the New Democrats propose, also won't help, if that insurance only assists the unemployed. The solution will require parliamentarians to discuss these issues and work on them in a collaborative way.

At a recent event marking the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, the All-Party Anti-Poverty Caucus outlined four key priorities for the coming year: housing, inequality, food security and the working income tax benefit (WITB). The WITB was introduced in 2007 to address "the disincentive to work" by providing financial support to low income workers while encouraging them to enter or stay in the workforce. It tops-up the wages of low-income workers to a prescribed limit, so they're better off working than they would be collecting social assistance. It's an excellent idea that has garnered multi-partisan support.

But the WITB, like any program, is imperfect. By decreasing payouts, it has still created a kind of "welfare wall," which can discourage work. It also puts the financial burden of assisting low-income workers entirely on

the shoulders of the government, rather than encouraging employers to fulfill their responsibility to provide decent wages and hours.

For decades, Christians of all political persuasions have worked hard to fight poverty in Canada, oftentimes naming a job as a guaranteed way out of poverty. But the rise of the working poor represents a glaring hole in our conventional thinking. When our old models of fighting injustice become inadequate, we must push ourselves to create new ones that include everyone. The voice of the business community has become a political trump card and Christian business people need to make sure their values are represented in the marketplace. It's vital for Christian business owners to pay a living wage themselves, and encourage other businesses to do the same. Community groups must step up too. Anti-poverty advocates and their supporters must present policy recommendations that fight for *all* Canadians, not just those that make fundraising easy. This means not only campaigning for children and seniors, but also the working poor. It's time to dig deeper and challenge the injustices that can lead to anyone living in poverty, especially someone who has a job.

The establishment of the WITB offered an example of excellent out-of-the-box thinking to fight poverty. It's encouraging now to see parliamentarians from all parties come together to improve these efforts. The next steps lie with us. As citizens and people of faith, we need to remain engaged and informed as we hold their feet to the fire.

Brad Wassink is a policy intern with Citizens for Public Justice. He lives in Ottawa.



Column

From the Lab



Rudy Eikelboom

Italian earthquake trial: Science in the dock

Can a seismologist be guilty of manslaughter?



In October, an Italian judge sentenced seven scientists and engineers to jail for six years for events around a massive 2009 earthquake in L'Aquila that killed over 300 people. More particularly, the scientists were sentenced for their work on a risk assessment committee that, the judge argued, gave misleading, superficial advice. This advice, the judge ruled, led people to respond inappropriately to warning shocks, putting themselves at risk; as a result more people died in the earthquake. While the legal process is not complete (several levels of appeal will follow), scientists are concerned about the message sent by this conviction about working in a politically charged but important public policy area.



A policeman views the damage in L'Aquila.

likelihood of a larger, more dangerous earthquake to come. The scientists met to discuss this question and basically concluded that the small shocks did not indicate an increased risk of a larger quake. Unfortunately, they communicated this conclusion to the community poorly, suggesting (wrongly) that the small quakes reduced the probability of a large quake. The public inferred that a large earthquake was not going to happen. Instead, a few days later a large, 6.3-magnitude earthquake occurred, causing massive destruction and death.

Paralyzing research?

There are two issues that concern scientists about the criminal convictions of the individuals involved. First, the case is largely based on the nature of the advice given by one person in a press conference, advice about a very low-probability but high-risk event (a strong earthquake). Any such advice is by its very nature based on a statistical assessment and is occasionally going to be wrong. If there is a 1-in-1000 chance of something happening, how do you warn people? If one always predicted the rare-but-unlikely event, the public fear generated would be costly. Public panic can have many direct and indirect adverse consequences. Further, repeated warnings would eventually be ignored.

Second, the criminal convictions could lead scientists and others to avoid important areas of research with immediate public relevance. Would the threat of a criminal trial if one were wrong cause a researcher to avoid speaking on any sort of risk? Apparently, in the U.S. a scientist who gives an honest opinion is protected from prosecution (I don't know if Canadian laws are similar), but this protection does not apply everywhere. If one wants unbiased advice, then the individual offering the advice needs to be protected from reprisal. Many scientists are now saying that they would be reluctant to offer advice, particularly in Italy.

In hindsight, the particulars of this case clearly indicate that it was badly handled, and lessons need to be learned about how to communicate in a potentially dangerous situation. As I write, Hurricane Sandy is bearing down on the upper U.S. coast line, and the news channels are full of advice and warnings about the danger this storm may bring. The communication and warnings are almost continuous; they do have a cost, however, especially if the storm goes out into the Atlantic rather than inland and causes much less damage than predicted. But a hurricane is a single event that comes with clear warning. If one lives in a high-risk earthquake area, a place with chronic risk, one may need to deal with the risk differently.

As followers of the Creator, we recognize that God alone is in control of all aspects of creation. Earthquakes are part of his world. We also know, even in the aftermath of an earthquake, that God loves us enough to send his son Jesus Christ to live and die for us, as the way that we will be united with him. These two pieces of our faith are given to us so that we can trust God in all of our circumstances. But we also have the responsibility to use the intelligence God has given us to assess risky situations, communicate clearly and respond appropriately; for example, church steeples need lightning rod protection. And scientists are concerned that seismologists, whatever their faults, shouldn't be found guilty of manslaughter for advice about earthquake risk.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca), who can't predict earthquakes or hurricanes, is a member of the Waterloo CRC and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University.



Italian scientists were sentenced to jail last month for giving "bad advice" before this 2009 earthquake.

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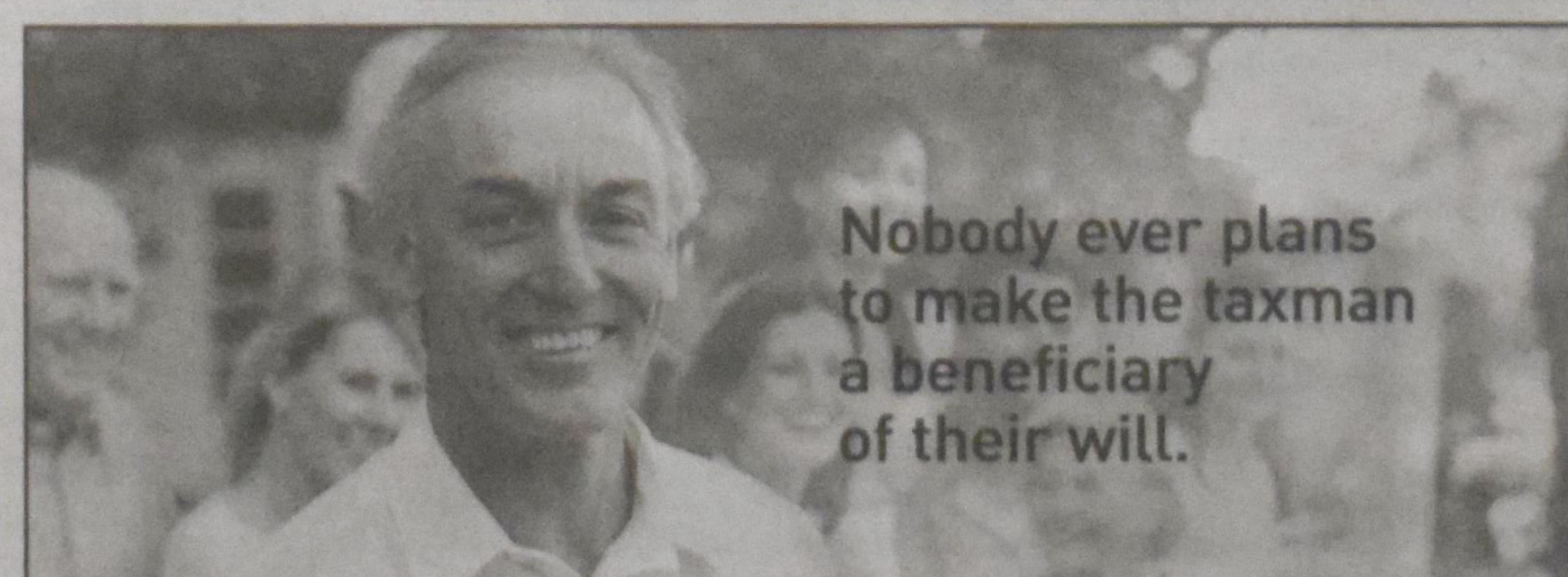
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Editorials

Sandy and the White House: A report from New York City



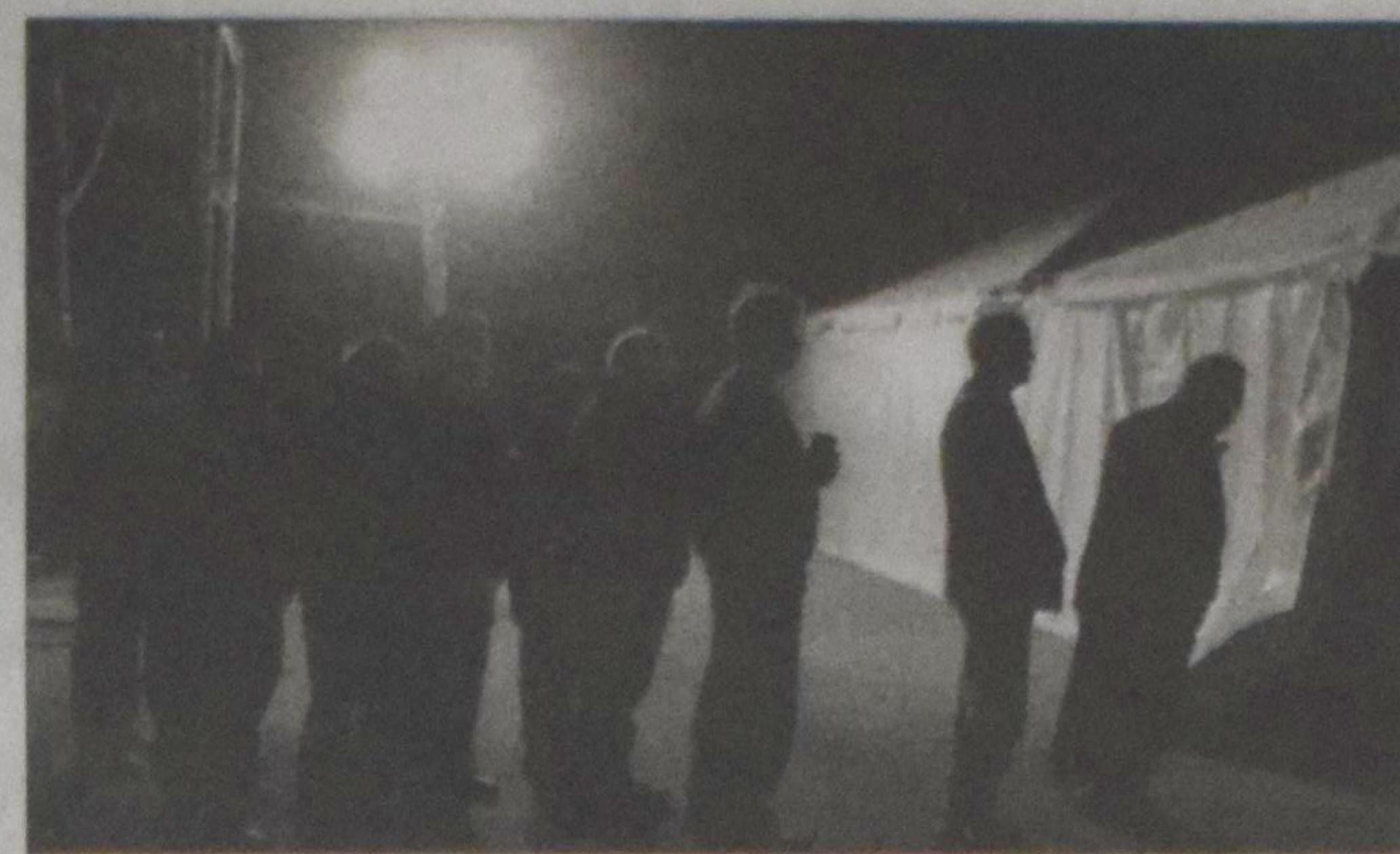
Daniel Meeter

On Tuesday, November 6, the people of the United States elected Barack Obama for a second term as President. The U.S., unlike most democracies, combines the offices of the Head of State and the leader of the government into a single office, and directly chooses that office in a single national election. This election happens regularly every four years, so this quadrennial national referendum has become a huge ritual of national repentance, revival, judgment, damnation, renewal and reconciliation. The American national character is so ideological that it's virtually a secular religion. Canadians might "love" Canada, but Americans "believe in" America. The election was a test of American doctrines and a choice between prophetic visions of how to repent and return or revive and renew America.

For many of us this election had two stories – the election happened in the aftermath of Super-storm Sandy. Residents of New York and New Jersey and the surrounding region had to struggle to vote as if in some undeveloped country. People were voting in tents set up with generators. People were voting in the backs of National Guard trucks. My wife and I live in Brooklyn, the largest and most populous borough of New York City, and it took us two hours to drive and walk the two miles to cast our vote. Most of us have been far more focused on living through the aftermath than on national politics. I spent the week after election day organizing volunteers to deliver food and flashlights and blankets to the victims of Sandy still without hydro or living in local shelters.

The two stories came together for the whole country with the visit of President Obama to New Jersey to survey the damage and destruction, not as a candidate, but as Head of State. His host was Governor Chris Christie, who had nominated Mitt Romney at the Republican convention. We watched the two of them, side by side, getting along, serving the afflicted and storm-tossed with power and compassion. Obama won a point for the federal government as a common good, and Christie did not deny it.

Romney lost and Christie won. I mean in terms of the Republican Party. Romney and Ryan, the VP candidate, represented the GOP as a sort of Christian heritage party, with Mormons now included among the Christians. The Party's platform was the public enforcement of personal moralities based on revealed religion, together with that unique American mythology of Revolution, liberty, violence, race and guns. But Christie represents the old pragmatic GOP, a progressive conservative party, anti-revolutionary, pro-federal government, and strong in favour of civil rights – the party of Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt and Eisenhower. The Republican Party will have to choose to be what Romney lost, or rather, what Christie won.



NY residents struggled to vote, as if in some undeveloped country.

ties based on revealed religion, together with that unique American mythology of Revolution, liberty, violence, race and guns. But Christie represents the old pragmatic GOP, a progressive conservative party, anti-revolutionary, pro-federal government, and strong in favour of civil rights – the party of Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt and Eisenhower. The Republican Party will have to choose to be what Romney lost, or rather, what Christie won.

America's two gospels

Romney lost, in great part, because of the changing demographics. Romney appealed to the white male Christians whose majority is dwindling. Obama, though himself a converted, practicing, Trinitarian Christian, is a symbol of America's increasing diversity of colour and religion, for whom the sacred mythological heritage of America means little and for whom the U.S. Constitution is not a sacred document (as it is for the Tea Party and the Mormons). They care more about the American future, and Obama represents that future.

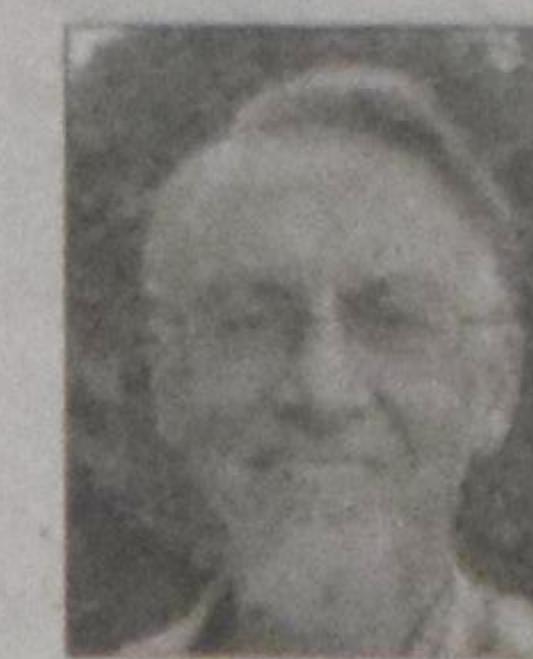
It's a fearful future. Super-storm Sandy symbolized climate change and global warming. More storms are coming. People fear there is no going back to normal, and what will the new normal be? Romney represented going back – even "taking back" America. What does that mean for the devastated Jersey Shore, and Atlantic City, and Coney Island? Building them back the way they were, or rebuilding them as "green"? Now, suddenly, new federal initiatives make sense, the kind Obama was talking about.

The sacred mythology of America has two gospels in it: the original Gospel of the Revolution, of the War of Independence from Great Britain, and the later Gospel of the Immigration, of Ellis Island, and the Lower East Side of Manhattan and the sweatshops and the labour unions. These two represent the tensions of America, between the values of the patriot (individualism, the right to bear arms, hatred of the crown and distrust of government) and the values of the immigrant (community, hard work, the protection of the government against the rich tycoon). The tensions between freedom and equality and between liberty and justice are the tensions of democracy. Romney ran on one gospel, and Obama on the other.

In the Great Depression that followed the stock market crash of 1929, Americans chose for FDR, and they stayed with him during the War. In the Great Recession that followed the Wall Street debacle of 2008, Americans chose for the party of FDR and this November they stayed with it. They chose for the party that values compassion over righteousness, the commonwealth (emphasis on "common") over the individual, the immigrants over the patriots, and the possible future over the Founding Fathers. It is a risky choice, but the electorate doubted there were any certainties anyway. Some Christians see the choice as a rejection of Christian values. Others see it as a return to the separation of church and state, for the good of both, and that the Kingdom of God is best served by a desacralized America.

Daniel Meeter is pastor of the Old First Reformed Church of Brooklyn, N.Y. (founded 1654) and a dual citizen of the U.S. and Canada. His most recent book is Why Be A Christian (If No One Goes to Hell) [an ebook available from Amazon].

Internet bullying and tri-pod people



Bert Witvoet

Amanda Todd, a 15-year-old girl in Port Coquitlam, British Columbia, took her own life after a dramatic plea for help on the Internet. The video and suicide drew world-wide attention. Eight young female students were arrested in London, Ontario, for cyber bullying.

Welcome to the second decade of the 21st century. This could not have happened in the previous century, when teenagers did not have easy access to the Internet with personal electronic devices.

An i-Phone has become a fatal weapon in the hands of immature teenagers. Someone remarked in a discussion I was part of that bullying has always been there and that kids have to learn to deal with it. But that's overlooking the fact that Internet bullying is a new reality and that it produces more victims.

What is different today is that the Internet creates an artificial community and provides anonymity at the same time. The bullying takes place not necessarily on the playground of a school but through a medium that is available worldwide. Sometimes teens make bad decisions – like allowing themselves to be photographed naked. Once that image hits the air, it's there forever, and it shows up in places you would not have imagined.



Iphone: fatal weapon?

Another difference today is that teenagers live in a spiritual vacuum in their schools and families. How many still receive religious instruction or attend a house of worship?

Risky isolation

I realize that the topic of bullying is a matter of great complexity. What can parents do about it? It has a lot to do with the isolation that comes with being a teenager, especially in our society. Teenagers shut themselves off from adults because they are struggling to be free or they are confused about who they are or are becoming. They lock themselves into bedrooms and enter the world of the Internet, the cell phone, Facebook and Twitter. This isolation gets worse when both parents work outside the house or when one busy parent is all they have to connect with.

It is especially at this time that teens are very vulnerable. It is especially at this time that parents need to reach out and be available. This process of building a relationship has to start early, of course. You can't suddenly turn on the friendship tap when hormones start to affect your son or daughter. A strong community, family, school, church and extended family are indispensable in growing healthy children who can withstand the onslaught of negative peer pressure.

Such building blocks also help children not to become bullies. We need a two-prong attack on the destructive reality of bullying and being bullied. Most of this effort has to come from the nurturing and disciplining efforts of the tripod: home, school and church. The state really has no role to play here. Criminalizing bullying is not effective and cannot possibly bring healing.

Good books and articles are part of the toolset that tripod people can use to prevent the isolation of teenagers from wise and loving adults. One such book is *Hold On to Your Kids: Why Parents Matter* by Gordon Neufeld

Continued on page 5

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Letters**Strive for better witness in business relationships**

Thank you to John Vriend and Bert Witvoet for their excellent articles written earlier this year: "Good Ethics means mutual faithfulness," and "Christian Schools, contracts and ethical practice" (July 9, *Christian Courier*). The words in both of those articles have been on our minds a lot, since losing our friend and teacher earlier this year. The statement "the way we treat our teachers is a matter of witness to the world" is so true and we as Christian schools and communities should strive to do just that. We need to remember that when we interact with each other through our schools, churches and businesses it can have lasting effects that can do more damage than good in the end. Thank you again for your boldness.

Kelly Bill
Jarvis, Ont.

Canadian court process, not settlement amount, is the problem

A truthful relationship must first be grounded on facts ("Finding a Balance: Working toward a truthful relationship with Canadian First Nations," October 22). The musings of Guy Freedman, president of First Peoples Group, on the residential school system (RSS) settlement process do little to assist.

Mr. Freedman is simply wrong when he compares average RSS student compensation in Canada (he says \$27,000) to the amount given to victims of pedophile priests in Los Angeles (we are told \$1,000,000). The former number does not include a sexual abuse component, while the latter number is the product of American courts (Canadian tort lawyers would far prefer to litigate claims south of the border rather than struggling to meet their BMW payments on this side).

Sharing grace and truth

Thanks so much for publishing Meredith K.C. Gipson Hoogendam's excellent editorial on living with post-partum depression (Oct. 8, *Christian Courier*). Stories like hers and Verna Haverhals' in the October *Banner* help to reduce the stigma of mental illness and pave the way for others to be more open about their own journeys. They are a blessing to the church! Thanks too for the list of resources, including the ministry of which I am a part. People who would like to read more stories like Meredith's can find them at our story project, Stories of Grace and Truth. So far we have assembled 27 works of prose, poetry, and visual art at crena.org/graceandtruth. We welcome others to share their stories there too!

Mark Stephenson, Director
Disability Concerns,
Christian Reformed Church

Speaking up about mental illness

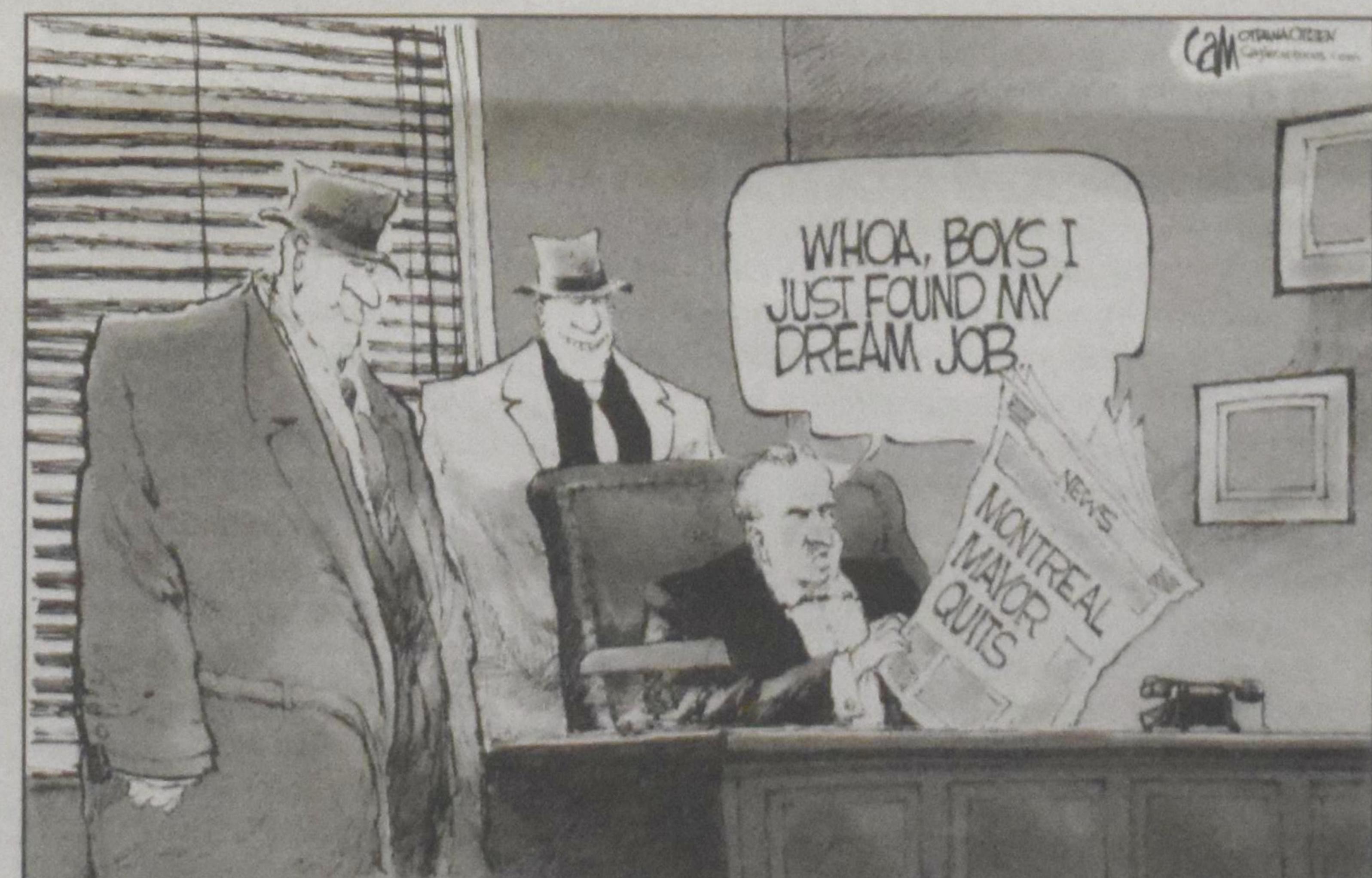
Hoogendam's article on mental illness deeply moved me ("The dopamine made me do it," October 8). Thank you for speaking on behalf of those who are uncomfortable with speaking about this subject. As someone living with a mental illness I agree with the author's stand that the church needs to be more involved in providing compassionate care for the mentally ill and their families. I also agree it is time for churches to break the silence.

I would like to suggest an additional option [for your list of resources]: Recovery International. This wonderful organization celebrated its 75th anniversary this month. Dr. Abraham Low, a neuro-psychiatrist in Chicago, developed this program when he noticed his patients would get well and go home, only to relapse and end up back in the hospital. He wanted to help his patients function as well as possible in daily life. Dr. Low's program has stood the test of time, helping many suffering people to maintain their mental health and live more peaceful, more productive lives. Today there are face-to-face meetings as well as phone and on-line meetings available.

Dr. Low's "tools" are a form of cognitive behavioural therapy. Dr. Low's genius is the way he teaches people not only what to do, but also how to do it. For example, my mind tells me continually that God is angry with me. I do not choose to have these tormenting thoughts – it is my illness speaking. However, I can choose my response. In the safety of a group of people struggling with similar symptoms, I practice being "humble, plain and average" rather than "exceptional, arrogant, and self-important," to "lower my standards" so my "performance will rise," to not "take my dear self so seriously," and to give myself a mental pat on the back for every effort, however small. I tell myself "subjective feelings are not objective facts," and "replace insecure thoughts with a secure thoughts."

Dr. Low firmly believed "there are no hopeless cases," and "helplessness is not hopelessness." We who have been helped thank God for the work of Recovery International (recoverycanada.org).

Liz Boersma
Surrey, B.C.

**Internet bullying and tri-pod people** *continued*

and Gabor Maté, which points out that children need an "attachment relationship" with their parents in order to flourish. It also indicates that "the most damaging of the competing attachments that thwart and disempower parental authority and parental love is the increasing bonding of our children with their peers" (p. 6). The authors say that it is never too late to re-establish an attachment relationship, and that there is much adults can do in homes and classrooms to keep themselves from being replaced prematurely.

We needed to support our parents and teachers with much prayer. This is a difficult time to raise children. My generation of parents had it easy compared to what modern parents face today. Churches must be strongly focused on taking children seriously and making them feel they belong. Pastors, please pay attention to the teens in your midst. When you preach, don't bore them into further isolation. Also, parents, teachers, pastors, church community, keep in mind what Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "One act of obedience is better than 100 sermons." The opposite is true as well: One act of disobedience is like tying a millstone around the neck of our youth, and throwing them into a sea of isolation and cynicism.

One generation must, in word and deed, call out to the next: "Our God is good, and his hand is strong."

Bert Witvoet, who lives in St. Catharines, Ont. rode the bus to Brock University one day and did not need to engage any of the students on the bus in a conversation. All of them were hooked up to an i-Pod in splendid isolation.

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News

Lebanese scholar: Mideast Christians' fears are not 'hallucinatory'

BYBLOS, Lebanon (CWN) — Habib Malik, a professor of history and cultural studies at the Lebanese American University, told Vatican Radio that the "real fears" of Middle East Christians following the Arab Spring "are not hallucinatory or born of a fertile imagination."



Malik is the son of Charles Malik (1906-87), an Eastern Orthodox Christian who helped draft the U.N. Declaration on Human Rights.

"The euphoria around the so-called Arab Spring is beginning to wear thin with time," said Malik. "The expectations that these changes, the collapse of these oppressive regimes would usher in a new era of democracy, freedom, and human rights has unfortunately and sadly been exaggerated."

"Instead, we are facing the real possibility of chaos, of replacements for these regimes that might turn out to be worse than the regimes themselves, especially [where] minorities and native Christian communities are concerned," he added. "If

the result of the Arab Spring is that Salafism and Jihadism are going to proliferate and anchor themselves in country after country, then we are seriously facing something very disturbing, which can be called the 'slippery slope.'"

At a conference in Washington, Malik elaborated on his earlier comments, focusing further on the decline of non-Muslim minorities in the Arab Middle East. "A fact about the Middle East that is inconvenient, if not embarrassing to the Western secular mind is [that] the ultimate identity in the Middle East is religious, and remains so to this day," Malik said. "This is true of all the various groups there. Aside from Sunni Muslims, every other religious group is a minority in the Middle East and the Islamic world as a whole."

Christians make up the largest native non-Muslim population of 10-15 million people. However, the number of Christians is not increasing through evangelization but declining because of persecution, poor socio-economic prospects, political instability and a lower birth rate than Muslims. ▶

Churches grieve losses after Sandy, work toward normalcy

NEW YORK (CRCNA) — Most Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church in America congregations in New Jersey and New York are open and doing ministry following the recent Hurricane Sandy. But even as they reach out, members of some of these churches and ministries are also grieving the loss of friends and loved ones as the result of the storm that came ashore on Oct. 29.

In one tragic instance, an elder for a RCA congregation in New Jersey was killed by a falling tree branch. Meanwhile, members of CRC and RCA congregations have either lost or know someone who did lose a loved one due to the storm. More than 100 people died as a result of the hurricane, according to authorities.

Then there was the flood damage caused by the storm surge. This damage is affecting — and will no doubt long affect — the lives of some of the most vulnerable among the people in New Jersey and New York, the more so as freezing temperatures and a winter storm followed on the heels of Sandy.

Water from Sandy's storm surge flooded a Staten Island warehouse for Project Hospitality, an RCA program that ministers to the homeless and to those who have HIV/AIDS. In lower Manhattan, City Grace, a CRC congregation, has had to make do after the theatre in which the church meets was flooded. Other congregations are still dealing with the storm-surge damage and havoc wreaked by high winds that felled trees and downed buildings.

Frequent 'hurricanes' in their lives

Located in a refurbished warehouse in Jersey City, New City Kids escaped much of the storm's wrath, allowing it to respond quickly. The CRC-affiliated group was founded in 2000. It opened its doors for prayer and offered activities for young people. New City Kids is not a church in the normal sense with worship services on Sunday. But it is a place for people to gather, to celebrate God and to pray.

Based near historic downtown in Jersey City, the ministry runs programs designed to reach out to families and, especially, to teach and encourage young people. While New City Kids is currently working to address the immediate post-Sandy needs of people in its neighborhood, it also realizes that there is much more that has to be done.

The extent of the damage from Hurricane Sandy is still emerging. The lives of already struggling families have been hit hard, said Rev. Trevor Rubingh, executive director of New City Kids. Many of the people with whom New City Kids works are going to face ongoing economic hardships from flood damage to their homes, the loss of their possessions, the loss of their car and not being able to work, said Rubingh.

"These are people who experience various hurricanes in their lives much of the time. . . . The bills will come in and they won't be able to pay them. Right now, their needs are under the surface," he said.

Rubingh asked for prayer for the children

Britain: Brethren denied charity status over Communion beliefs

LONDON (TCI) — The right of churches to decide for themselves who may attend Holy Communion is being challenged by Britain's Charity Commission.

The commission has refused to register a Plymouth Brethren group because its Communion services are for members only. This would have a huge impact on the group's tax relief and would also have serious implications for many other Christians.

Elders from the Plymouth Brethren gave evidence on the matter to a parliamentary select committee early this month. During the evidence a letter from the commission's head of legal services emerged, claiming that churches cannot be assumed to be acting for the public good.

The letter said: "This decision makes it clear that there was no presumption that religion generally, or at any more specific level, is for the public benefit, even in the case of Christianity or the Church of England."

Suppressing Christianity

The row, which has been going on for seven years, began after the commission denied charitable status to one of the Brethren group's churches in Devon. The Christian Institute is intervening in the case in a bid

to protect religious liberty for all churches. The Christian Institute describes itself as "a non-denominational Christian charity committed to upholding the truths of the Bible." It exists for "the furtherance and promotion of the Christian religion in the United Kingdom" and "the advancement of education."

A Charity Commission spokeswoman said of the current case, "The application [by the Brethren] was not accepted on the basis that we were unable to conclude that the organization is established for the advancement of religion for public benefit within the relevant law."

During the early-November hearing Charlie Elphicke, a Conservative MP, asked the Plymouth Brethren if they thought the commission was "actively trying to suppress religion in the UK, particularly the Christian religion." The MP for Dover answered his own question. "I think they [the Commission] are committed to the suppression of religion, and you are the little guys being picked on to start off a whole series of other churches who will follow you there." ▶



Members of the Reformed Church in America prepare relief supplies.

in the church's after school centre, and for their families. He also asked for prayers for the city as it works to recover from the storm, and as the group continues to assess and look to obtain resources to help people in their community. Rubingh added, "Please pray for calm to remain in the city. Pray especially for the neighborhoods surrounding New City."

Denominational organizations mobilized

Meanwhile, Pat and Rich Grasman, early assessment volunteers for World Renew, drove through Atlantic City the week after the storm. As they drove on, the couple passed by closed casinos, deserted streets and the occasional blinking traffic light. They were deliberately working their way into destruction that others have fled.

As the assessment of damage and needs is done, World Renew (formerly the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee) will send disaster relief volunteers to New York and New Jersey to cut down trees, clean debris from the roads and houses and to help churches in the area in whatever ways they can.

Reformed World Relief Committee, the RCA's disaster relief arm, has also sent teams to help assess and to clean up storm damage. ▶

New City Kids can be reached at their website: newcitykids.com, where donations can also be made. To learn more about and to donate to World Renew's efforts, visit "Hurricane Relief" at worldrenew.net. For more information on the RCA's efforts, visit "Storm Clean Up" at rca.org.

News

Germany: Merkel makes plea to support persecuted Christians

BERLIN (CCO) – German Chancellor Angela Merkel has said that Christianity is “the most persecuted religion worldwide.” Merkel made the statement as she argued that German foreign policy should be more sensitive to the concerns of Christian minorities in other lands.



Merkel addressed a synod of the German Protestant Church.

Merkel’s call for support for Christians drew a quick rebuke from the German Green Party. Green Party leader Jerzy Montag described Merkel’s comments as “not very helpful” and “mistaken” – despite the fact that data from international groups who monitor persecution shows the truth of Merkel’s assertion.

Montag insisted that other religious groups face greater dangers worldwide.

Merkel made her plea on behalf of Christians while delivering a speech to the synod of the German Protestant church at Timmendorfer Strand in northern Germany on November 5. ➤

Evangelical leader offers advice to Christians in election aftermath

Marian Van Til, with files from albertmohler.com

LOUISVILLE, Kentucky – On the day after the re-election of U.S. President Obama, well-known Southern Baptist leader Albert Mohler addressed the thousands of American Christians in his Southern Baptist constituency and who are readers of his online blog. Mohler is the president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, but is known for his Reformed leanings.

In an essay entitled “Aftermath: Lessons from the 2012 Election,” Mohler asserted that “several lessons emerge in the immediate aftermath of the election and Christians should consider them carefully.”

Though Obama won the popular vote by a very small margin, Mohler began by noting that “against the expectations of many, the President held his 2008 coalition together. Voting intensity among younger Americans, African-Americans, Hispanics and other crucial constituencies held firm.” Mohler added, “Obama’s ‘evolution’ on the issue of same-sex marriage cost him nothing. That probably surprised both sides in that controversy.”

“We are rightly and deeply concerned,” wrote Mohler, and many evangelical Christians are distraught over the election result. “But Christians must now pray for our President,” he exhorted, quoting Paul in 1 Timothy 2: “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”

Pray and pray again

Mohler went on to say, “We must pray that God will change President Obama’s heart on a host of issues, ranging from the sanctity of unborn life to the integrity of marriage. We must push back against his contraception mandate that tramples upon religious liberty. Given the trajectory of his first term in office, we are urgently concerned about a second term, knowing that the President will never again face the electorate. . . . We must pray that President Obama will lead in a spirit of national unity and mutual respect, bringing Americans together to resolve these ominous problems.



Mohler urges Christians to pray for changes in the re-elected President’s heart.

Incredible responsibility now rests on his shoulders. He has won a second term, now he must rightly lead.”

Mohler then noted six states-of-affairs that were revealed by the election: “a divided electorate,” “a changed and changing electorate,” “the demise of the ‘Republican coalition’,” “a catastrophe on moral issues,” “more than the presidency was at stake” and “it’s not really about politics.”

The popular vote revealed a deeply divided nation, said Mohler. “This deep division at the level of worldview presents President Obama with a daunting political challenge, but a worldview crisis is an even greater challenge for the church.”

He noted that the American electorate is now far more ethnically, culturally and ideologically diverse than it used to be. It is also more urbanized – and more secular, even though two-thirds of Americans still self-identify as Christians. “Recent studies have indicated that the single greatest predictor of voting patterns is the frequency of church attendance,” but church attendance has fallen.

Mohler concluded by saying, “Christians must never see political action as an end, but only as a means. We can never seek salvation through the voting booth, and we must never look for a political messiah. Nevertheless, Christians do bear a political responsibility, established in love of God and love of neighbor. . . . Being in the world but not of the world has never been easy. The 2012 election underlines the challenges we now face and the responsibilities we dare not neglect.”

To read the whole essay see albertmohler.com. ➤

Ottawa: ‘Hate crimes’ bill would allow men to use women’s restrooms, pro-family groups say

OTTAWA (LifeSiteNews) – Numerous pro-family organizations and one conservative MP are calling upon Canadians to oppose a “hate crimes” bill they warn will allow men to use women’s restrooms and showers.

The private members bill, Bill C-279, would include “gender identity” and “gender expression” in the hate crimes sections of the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code.

The controversial bill has been dubbed the “bathroom bill” by critics, who say it would give men a legal alibi to use women’s bathrooms, shower rooms and changing rooms. They worry this will lead to an increase in sexual assaults. Critics also warn that the bill furthers the ideology of the sexual revolution that sees gender as a fluid social construct that can be separated from one’s biological birth sex.

At CC press time, the bill was expected to face a third reading and final vote any day.

REAL Women of Canada wants Canadians to tell their MPs to oppose the Bill, “with or without amendments.” In a press release the organization said, “The major effect of this bill is that transgendered, transsexual and sexually confused individuals will be given full protection re-employment, services, housing, etc., in public institutions under federal jurisdiction. These behaviours will be ‘normalized,’ accepted

and protected. All Canadians are already equal before and under the law. Bill C-279 is not necessary.”

Special interest asking special rights

Jim Hughes, president of Campaign Life Coalition, has also urged Canadians to “contact their MPs and tell them to vote against the bill.” Hughes said he could “not believe the ignorance of MPs who can’t see that this bill is about a special interest group pushing the government to give them special rights. Have courage and speak up.”

The bill, sponsored by NDP Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual and Transgendered critic Randall Garrison (Esquimalt – Juan de Fuca, BC), passed its second reading last June. Voting followed party lines except for 13 Conservative MPs who voted in its favour. A number of other Conservative MPs have vocalized their opposition to the bill.

Calgary MP Rob Anders posted a petition on his website asking Canadians to oppose the bill since it would “give transgendered men access to women’s public washroom facilities.” Anders pointed out that it is “the duty of the House of Commons to protect and safeguard our children from any exposure and harm that will come from giving a man access to women’s public washroom facilities.”

Edmonton MP Brent Rathgeber argued that the bill has a

“fatal flaw” in that the “terms ‘gender identity’ and ‘gender expression’ are not defined.”

Rathgeber said that the “lack of definitions with respect to the terms creates a huge ambiguity as to who or what activities are to be protected.”

He also pointed out that the bill is redundant since “such individuals already enjoy Human Rights protection because ‘sex’ has always been a prohibited ground of discrimination.”

Jack Fonseca, project manager of Campaign Life Coalition, has called the bill a “threat [to] the lives of girls and women. It threatens the lives of girls and women by putting them at greater risk from male sexual predators. It will give men a legal alibi for getting caught in the girls bathroom or change room, thereby freeing them to offend another day. Men who plan to assault women in the bathroom, or even a common ‘peeping tom’ hoping to watch girls undress or videotape them, could escape prosecution by pretending to be a cross-dresser,” he said.

Numerous religious and pro-family organizations oppose the bill, including the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), the Catholic Organization for Life and Family and the Canada Family Action Coalition. ➤

Columns

Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch



Caution: This column may be unsuitable for funeral directors and vegans. We contacted XL Foods of Brooks, Alberta, for comment about, but received no reply.

Mark Twain once described an undertaker like this: "... he slid around in his black gloves with his softy soothering ways. ... He never spoke, he moved people around, he squeezed in late ones, he opened up passageways, and done it all with nods, and signs with his hands. Then he took his place over against the wall. He was the softest, glidingest, stealthiest man I ever see; and there warn't no more smile to him than there is to a ham."

"My" undertakers aren't silent; they scream, wheeze, gargle, squawk and caw. They pester each other, swooping,

Undertakers

trying for a talon-grip on a raven friend or enemy (who knows which when all are the same colour?). They mob coyotes but allow magpies and grey jays a place at the ceremonies. And they chuckle and chortle and smile.

The ravens (an *unkindness of ravens* is the collective noun), the undertakers, are presiding in our field today because of the death of Liko the steer. We had barely begun the skinning process when the first one passed over, turned his head and gave a call note. Two others did a quick turn and headed over from one-fourth mile away. Each



One raven sang #268 from the grey hymnal.

of them gave a call to her friends and soon there was a concatenation of birds soaring around watching us at work on our winter food supply.

Before the ravens decided it was safe to land in the trees, the grey jays were already stealing scraps. Next came the magpies, towing their ridiculous tails (how do they ever evade goshawks while dragging a towel behind?). Finally, chickadees, perhaps beneath the notice of the larger birds, zip in and out for blood-freezes.



"Kanazawa" (1978) by Japanese artist Masahisa Fukase.

Gathering Light

Emily Wierenga



To live is to love

I transplant a flower, rub the soil between my hands. It's so much easier to worship without walls, and we skipped church today. It's hard to skip church in a community that doesn't ever miss a Sunday. But we do sometimes, because the Sabbath is for man, not man for the Sabbath.

I'm realizing there are a lot of things we promote as Christians that I don't agree with. Like pews. (Why are they so hard? Shouldn't church be the most comfortable, welcoming, beautiful place?) And pro-life rallies. (The kind with squeaky shoes on sidewalks, and magic marker signs.)

My friend is on the pro-life committee. It seems I attract these kinds of people, and she is always trying to convince me to become actively pro-life.

I am pro-life, I tell her. I advocate for the unborn, but I also advocate for the born. For the very much alive, and broken. I don't shop at Wal-Mart or get my gas at Esso and I try to purchase fair-trade coffee because I am pro-life. And I am pro-life of the women considering the abortions, who need love more than judgment. Of the mothers who are thinking about ending the lives of their children, and you have to be in a pretty desperate place to consider something like this.

I understand the passion behind the rallies. I do. I have children. But I also have a husband and a home and the finances with which to raise these children. So it's pretty black and white for me, but it's not that way for everyone else.

And I wonder how we as a church can get so hung up



Trying to sit in the sunshine more with the people I love.

on promoting certain topics, while completely ignoring the others? What happened to holistic faith? Because this friend who is on the pro-life committee gave no thought to shopping at Wal-Mart after I told her about the sweatshop-children who make its products. How can we be pro-life in some things, and not in others?

I'm rubbing soil between my fingers and seeing myself on my hands. I am dirt. And I think we all need to experience a sort-of dying and transfiguration, because we're each as sinful as the other.

"[Jesus] manned himself, came manifest to us; and there on the mountain they saw him, really saw him, saw his light," says Madeleine L'Engle. "We all know that if we really see him we die. But isn't that what is required of us? *Then, perhaps, we will see each other, too.*"

Born bent

There's a sea of bent backs in church, farmers with brown necks and gray hairs and they bend further during prayer. And we're born bent and we die bent. Perhaps the door to heaven is very small? And the closer we get to the ground, the more able we are to enter the higher places.

I have no grandmothers alive anymore, and I miss them. My Grandma Dow was as bent as they come. Like a seed, all curled up and weighted down. Her fingers looked like she'd kept them in dishwater for 90 years. And she looked worried even when she smiled, but she also looked like a little girl. As Lamott says, we're all the ages we've ever been.

Grandma never stopped missing her brother, the one who died in war, and she is probably running in a park with him right now. Maybe they're drinking milkshakes. What do you do in heaven? It lasts forever, this eternal life. That's a lot of something that I don't know about.

I don't even know how to live here. I spend too much time pretending I know, and not enough time just admitting to being lost.

So I'm trying to sit in the sunshine more with the people I love because this much I know: life is love. You can't go wrong if you love somebody. And the more you love somebody, the more you die to yourself, so in many ways, I do know death. And it's not scary. It's probably the most beautiful thing in the world. ▶

Emily Wierenga is the author of *Chasing Silhouettes: How to Help a Loved One Battling an Eating Disorder* (Ampelon Publishing, 2012). Please visit emilywierenga.com for more info.

And the ravens. They eat, but they also talk. Some ornithologists say that ravens have as many as seventy different vocalizations. That only applies to the ravens that speak English. Many of "ours" seem to be bi-lingual or more. One raven didn't join the feast. She sat in an aspen tree about one hundred metres away from the kill site and sang what I am sure was "Klokje Klingt," a Dutch folk song. (For people who know the grey *Psalter Hymnal*, that's #268, which is a plea for forgiveness. Not bad for a member of *Unkindness Community Church*.)

Another raven repeated a *tschree, tschree* sound, which turned out to be a B natural (the first above middle C). I'm not sure of the significance of the pitch because that raven left for a nearby road kill. Other ravens condescended to use the plebeian *caw*, but most found that much too... well, *crowlike*.

Meanwhile, Chester the Wonder Dog had a field day dragging hoofs and shanks and trying to cache them wherever he could find unfrozen ground.

By the time we returned from bringing the two halves of Liko to the butcher shop for ageing, cutting and wrapping, two eagles were enthroned in cottonwood trees, surveying the scene with a certain majesty, perhaps even disdain. Like imperial world powers throughout history, they seem to leave the work of finding free resources to other creatures and then move in when the site is secure.

This whole scene, gory as it may be, is not unknown to the Creator who once asked Job this question:

Does the eagle soar at your command?...
He dwells on a cliff and stays there at night....
From there he seeks out his food;
his eyes detect it from afar.
His young ones feast on blood,
and where the slain are, there is he. (Job 39:28-29)

Our eagles, too, are scavengers, but nothing like the ravens. Some ravens fed Elijah but I doubt he labelled them as an *unkindness*. As for me, I am fascinated by their creative but grisly presence in our world. ▶

Curt (cgesch63@gmail.com) and Betsey Gesch raised Liko from birth and gave him a good, natural life with lots of grazing, with a plenitude of human and bovine attention. Liko died instantaneously.

Reviews

Christian novelist commits to pray for strangers

Brenda Visser

Author of four novels based in the American South, River Jordan turned to a personal challenge in writing *Praying for Strangers*.

Always an advocate for New Year's resolutions, Jordan decided to pray for a stranger every single day of the year. Coinciding with the departure of her adult sons to war-torn countries, her resolution challenges her assumptions about prayer. In the book, she examines the practice of prayer while sharing her adventurous stories of praying for strangers and telling them so in person.

River Jordan not only prays for those she doesn't know, like praying for children in Africa, she decides to pray for one individual she meets or sees around her that she doesn't already know. She resolves to tell one individual every day about her resolution, and because of this boldness and humility, amazing things began happen.

One of the stories in the first chapter tells how Jordan ended up receiving money from a homeless woman named Esther, who thought that River needed prayer. Jordan later donates the money to a church, all the while praying for the homeless woman. An interesting twist, and only one of many adventures she relates from a year of this praying resolution.

The few minutes a day that it took Jordan to tell people that she was praying for them changed lives. An abused girl who asks for prayers for her mother, a man whom she frequently sees in a parking lot, a suicide prevented. These bits of connection with strangers kept Jordan focused on her goal because not only were strangers blessed, she was too: "Praying for strangers," she writes, "is helping me become a better human being. I do this for me" (111).

Jordan relates stories that continue to reveal the mysterious ways in which God works. "This prayer thing . . . keeps me glued to a humanity that I could have turned my face away from so many times. . . . In the middle of everything, it has been keeping me balanced and sane as I look beyond my own circumstances" (133).

One evening while at a retreat, Jordan heard an infant crying non-stop. Her motherly instincts kicked in. Boldly, she knocked on the door of that room, and hearing no response, went in and picked up the baby. She instantly knew this was her "stranger" that needed prayer. She rocked the baby, prayed for its comfort, for its future, for its safety and well-being. A short while later, an older woman came into the room, not knowing the baby had been crying. It was the great-grandmother of the infant, and she was sad, because her orphan grandbaby would soon be going to another home. "A baby falls into my hands late at night while at a retreat? One with an unclear future being cast out onto a long road of maybes? I don't think it was chance at all" (192).

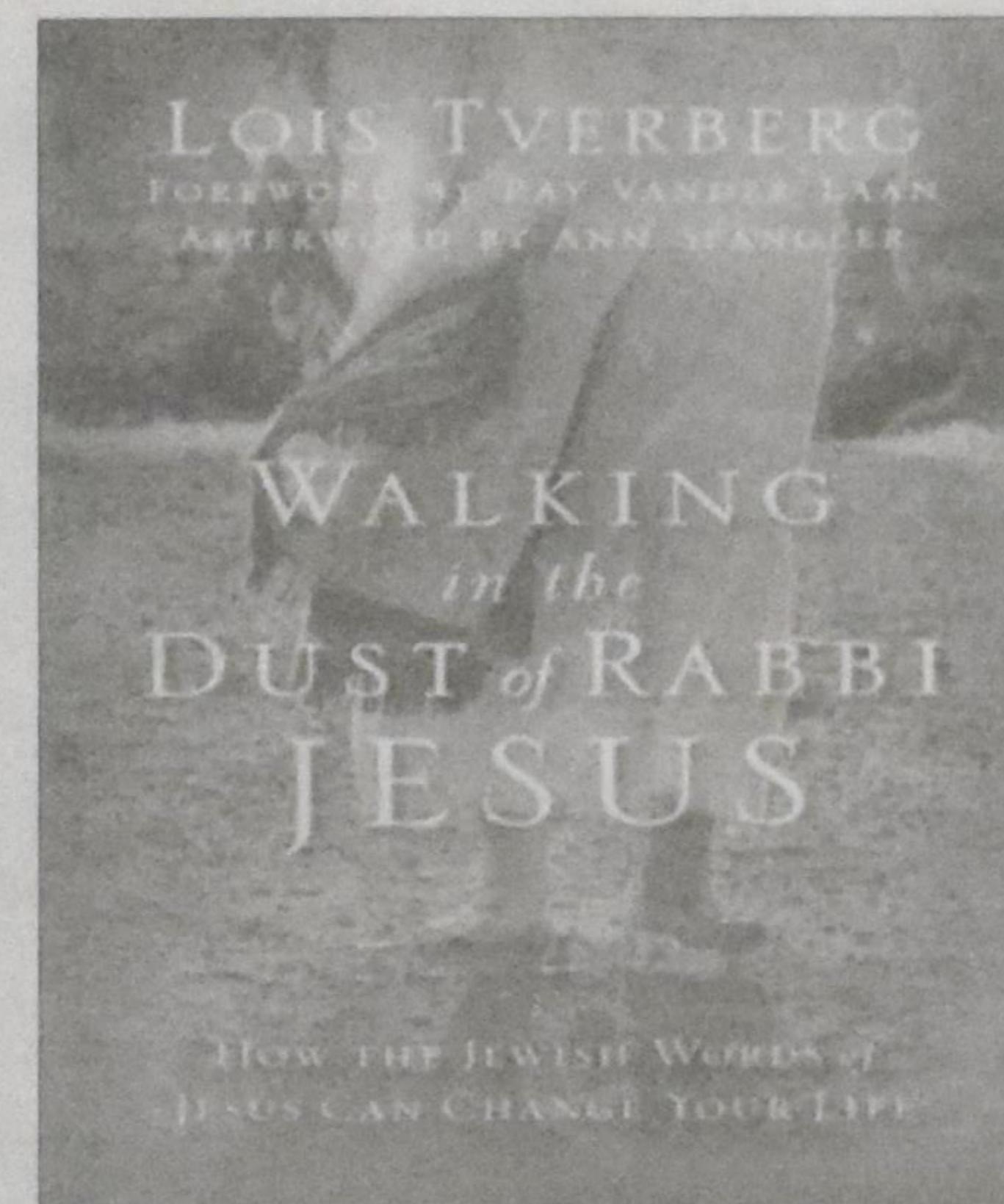
I love her honesty, as well as her effort to be intentional about praying for someone else, even when you feel like you yourself need prayer. She learns a lot about our humanity along the way and about our relationship with an Almighty God. "I've always wondered at Jesus," she writes. "I can get the part of him that is able to stay peaceful and calm in the middle of a raging storm on the sea. But it's his magnificence to stay calm and peaceful in the sea of humanity that has left me in awe and wonder" (175).

I think this is a superb book. Engaging, easy to read, and down-to-earth in its everydayness, it can be read quickly, or set aside to read one chapter at a time over several weeks. The overarching theme holds the book together strongly so it is easy to pick up where you left off – perfect for those who like to have three or four books on the go at once. Jordan is simply a good story-teller.

Some versions of this book include a reader's guide and discussion questions, which would make it great for small groups. It would appeal to a diverse readership. The truths in this book will have you thinking about prayer in a whole new way.

For anyone sincere about their faith and wanting to make a difference in the world, this book makes a compelling case for praying for strangers. If all Christians practiced this, the world would be changed and we would be too. ☽

Brenda Visser (brenda.visser@ripnet.com), mother of four and wife of one, lives and writes in Athens, Ontario.



*Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus:
How the Jewish Words of Jesus
Can Change Your Life*

by Lois Tverberg
Zondervan, 2012

these questions: "What would it be like to listen to Jesus' earth-shattering words through the ears of a first-century disciple?" (13). "What does it mean that Jesus lived as a Jewish rabbi who called and trained disciples? How does learning about his teachings in their original context enable us to better live out our calling? Could it be that the debris of time and cultural change have taken the edge off Jesus' earth-shattering words?" (20).

Tverberg assures readers that studying Jesus and other biblical characters in their cultural context does not necessarily require mastering textbooks brimming with information. In her own experience, "the simplest cultural details can unravel knotty mysteries, sometimes with powerful theological implications" (19). She gives an example in the context of God's command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac by asking, "How much would the firewood weigh for an average burnt offering?" (19). The answer sheds light on the question of how old Isaac was at that time: a small child, a teenager, or an adult. Tverberg points out that a sacrifice was offered by roasting an animal as a whole burnt offering, obviously not accomplished over a fire built from a bundle of wood a small child could manage to carry. Instead, such a fire would require logs that only a full-grown man's strength could bear. In fact, for most of the journey, two donkeys bore the heavy burden.

Tverberg summarizes her conclusions: "Once you envision an adult Isaac bearing the heavy wood, the story takes on an entirely different tone. Now we see that the story is not just about Abraham's unshakeable faith in God; it is about Isaac's willing, heroic obedience to submit to his father's will. And suddenly the scene of Christ carrying his cross comes starkly into view" (19-20).

Tverberg dusts off many biblical scenes in which Rabbi Jesus reveals himself as the Saviour of the world. Historical details this reader was not aware of shed fresh light on what Jesus meant when he talked about gaining a "good eye" (Matthew 6:22-23), when he commanded his followers not to judge others, and when he pointed out to the religious leaders and bystanders that his followers must give to God what was God's and to Caesar what was Caesar's.

Tverberg's insightful and accessible book is a clarion call for Christians to study God's word (both the Old and New Testaments, which are inseparable) within its cultural context and with new zeal and enthusiasm. It will, of course, be difficult at times, she admits. Even the rabbis found it difficult. Tverberg relates a story told by Rabbi Bahya Ibn Pakudah, who lived in the eleventh century: "The Scriptures are like a letter written by a king to a subject whom he loves. But when it arrives, the words have faded and the writing is unclear. Out of love for the king, knowing he's reading the very words written by the king's hand, the subject is happy to decipher it – in fact, he sees the difficulty of the task as proof of his love, strong enough to be put to the test" (151).

Tverberg draws the implications for us today as modern Bible readers: "Imagine that! When we grapple with difficult texts or dig into boring background information, it shows our love for Christ, that we're willing to put time and energy into discerning his words" (151). A clarion call, indeed! ☽

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Rediscovering the Rabbi Jesus

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Author Lois Tverberg owns a small clay sculpture depicting Jesus healing the blind man. A sticker on the sculpture's base identifies Peru as its country of origin. "But you hardly need the label to guess where it came from," she suggests, "when you see the dark braids, the ponchos, the Peruvian faces. Its creator, of course, had imagined Jesus within his or her own cultural reality, just as white Americans have cast Jesus as a blue-eyed Caucasian. As the gospel has gone out around the world, people have, almost by default, tended to picture Jesus through their own cultural lenses" (21-22). As a result, the Jewishness of Jesus has often been obscured.

Instead of succumbing to cultural "repaintings" of Jesus, Tverberg urges readers to consider these questions: "What would it be like to listen to Jesus' earth-shattering words through the ears of a first-century disciple?" (13). "What does it mean that Jesus lived as a Jewish rabbi who called and trained disciples? How does learning about his teachings in their original context enable us to better live out our calling? Could it be that the debris of time and cultural change have taken the edge off Jesus' earth-shattering words?" (20).



Tverberg re-examines familiar Bible passages with an emphasis on Jesus' words in context.



Features

The Christian as artist: an interview with Michael Card

Peter Frieswick

Award-winning musician and author Michael Card has produced 31 albums and 24 books, and performed thousands of concerts during his 30 year career. Card graciously agreed to an interview at Muskoka Bible Centre in Huntsville, Ontario in August, 2011. This is part of that unpublished interview.

How do you view your work as contributing to the greater good of the Body of Christ?

My job is to make people open the Bible. What I do is say things just obtusely enough that people say, "Where did he get that?" All I want people to do is open the Book. If they open it, I win. They don't have to agree with me.

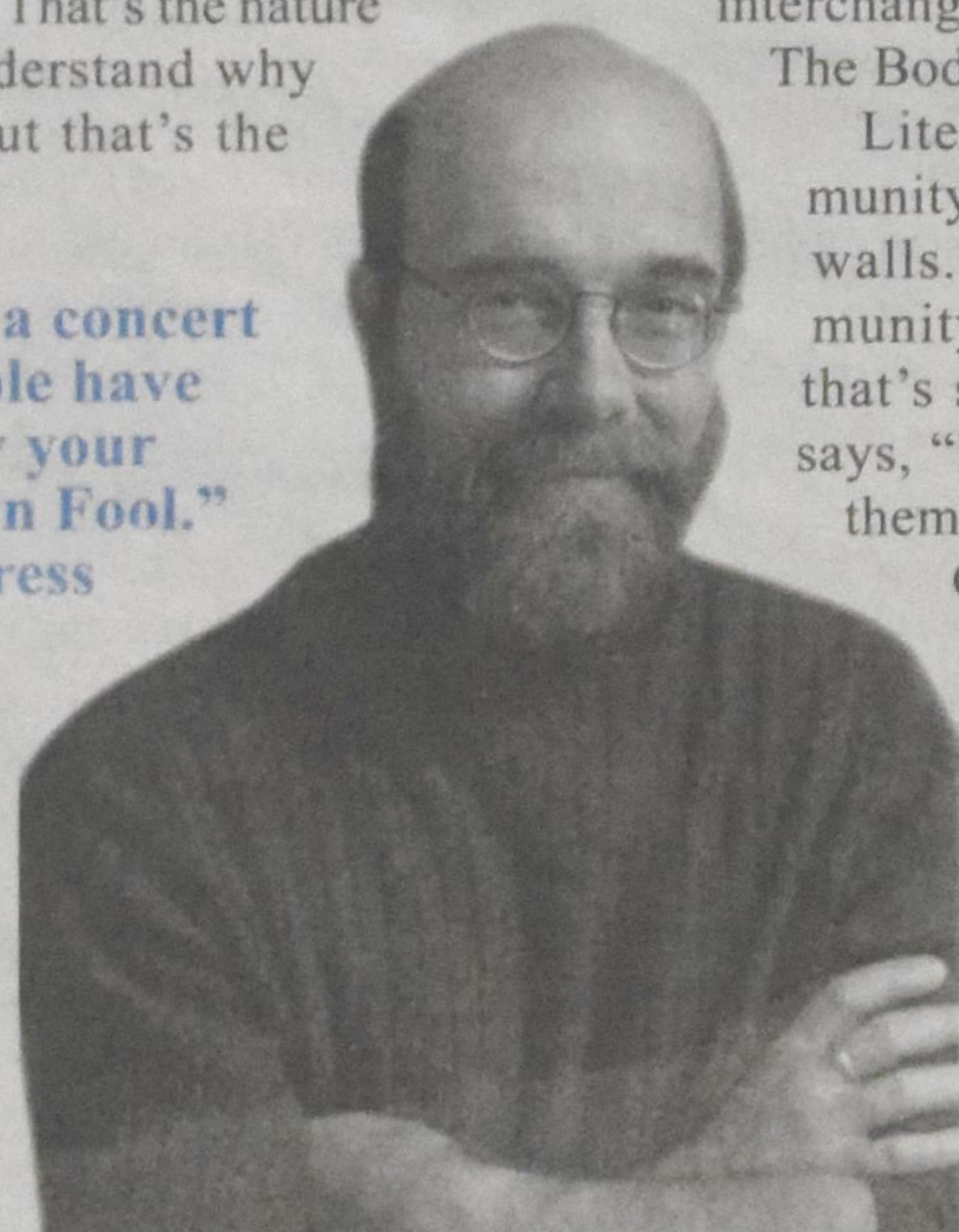
What do you think about the term "Christian" as it applies to art? Do you think there is such a thing as "Christian art"?

In so far as the subject matter is about Christ, I think that you can say it's Christian, but saying it's Christian doesn't necessarily mean it's good. I mean, I write Christian music – it's about Jesus. Some of it's good, some of it's not so good. Because it's about him doesn't make it good.

David Foster Wallace says that "good literature is that which comforts the disturbed and disturbs the comfortable." What do you think art made by Christians should do?

Well, I think art made by Christians should be completely informed by Christ. And Jesus was the best at disturbing people that were comfortable and comforting people that were disturbed and upset. We call that "radical reversal." People who shouldn't get the Gospel do, and people who should get it don't. Zachariah talks to Gabriel in the Holy Place – he doesn't get it. Mary, up in pagan Galilee, talks to Gabriel – she gets it. That's the pattern all through the Gospels. That's the nature of truth. I don't understand why that's the nature, but that's the nature of truth.

You once said in a concert that a lot of people have been offended by your song, "God's Own Fool." How do you address the concerns some may have about your work, especially when you think they may have misunderstood you?



I submit all my lyrics to my pastors, because there's no way you're going to please everybody. Every song I've ever written, somebody says something's wrong. I got accused of being a Jesus only person because I sing about Jesus so much, and I got accused of denying the Trinity which is absurd. But the group of pastors who know me, who know what I believe and what I'm about, I can submit my lyrics to them and they can tell me when I'm wrong.

If your pastors check your lyrics to make sure you're being theologically sound, what role do you think the church plays in the artist's life?

A community's everything. The community helps you determine what your gift is in the first place. I mean, I was told in the context of a little African-American church in Bolingview, Kentucky, "We believe you have a gift of music – we think you should write songs."

Too many young people think it's up to them to determine what their call is. It's not up to you – your community determines your call. That was my experience.

Because they see what's in you.

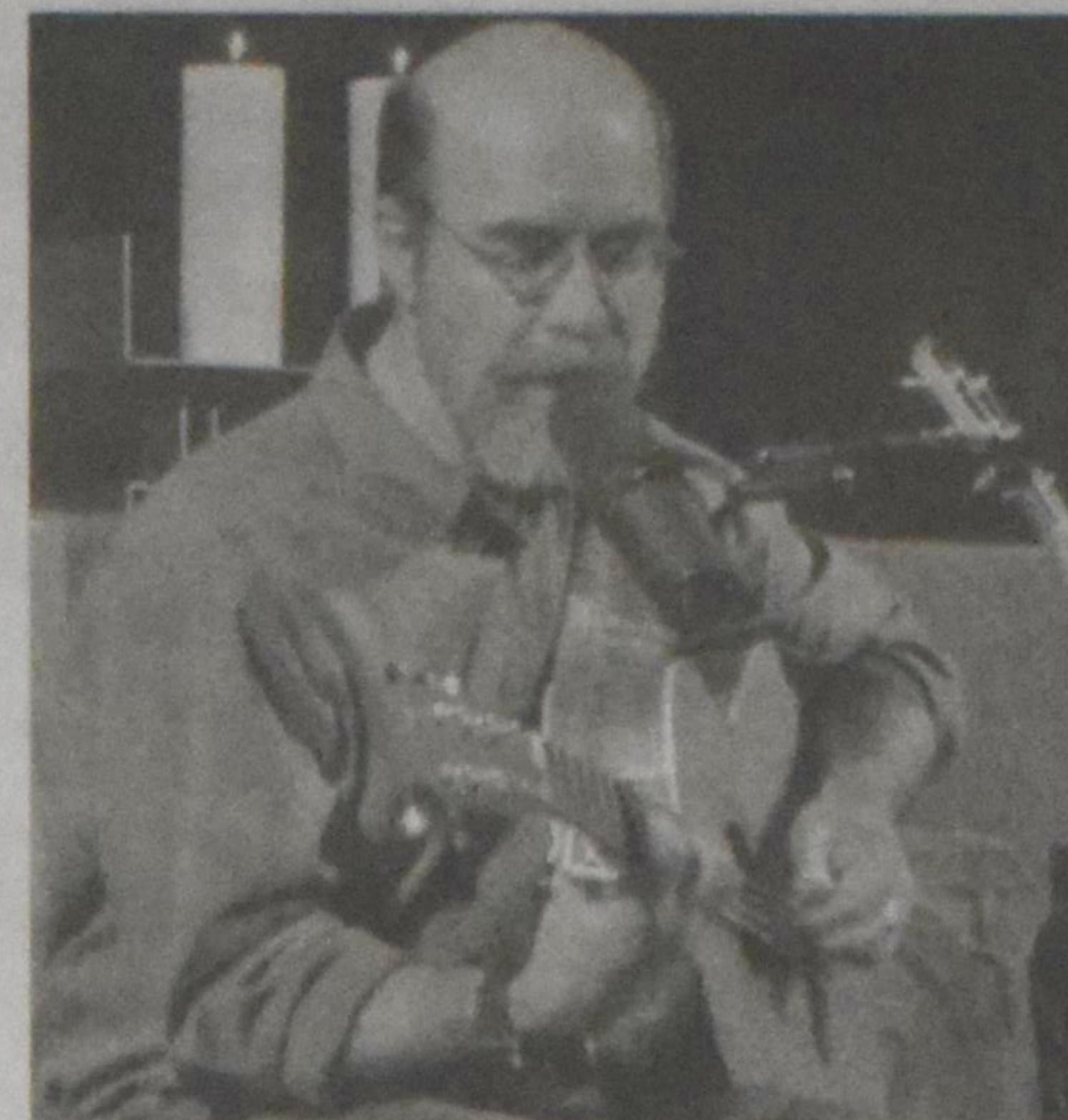
Right. And, you know, especially in music, we can be so self-deceived. There are so many people who think they are good at music because people in their church say, "Oh! Little Billy's really . . ." you know, and they do people a disservice. All your gifts – whether your gift is music or hospitality or mercy ministry or whatever it is, the community helps you determine what that gift is. Jesus helped his disciples determine where their gifts were.

When you call people to engage in community, what do you mean by it?

Community is my word for church, 'cause church doesn't mean church anymore. Church has all these connotations to it that aren't good, so it's kind of my interchangeable word for church. The Body.

Literally, the word "community" means "a place with walls." So when I say community I think of this place that's safe. God at one point says, "I will be a wall around them." It's this place where

God is sort of the wall around us. He protects us. Certainly he sends us into the dangerous world and that sort of thing, but there's also something to be said for being safe in these walls.



Musician and author, Michael Card.

an artist. How do you think creativity should be a part of everyone's life?

We have to redefine it. It's not this narrow thing of painting pictures and writing songs. I mean, look at Jesus' life. You always look at his life. How does Jesus express creativity? By his ability to connect with anybody.

To me, the highest level of creativity is being able to love people well – people that aren't so lovable most of the time. Jesus is very creative with that because he could always find a way in to someone like a Matthew, who's a traitor, who's a bad man. Writing songs, or painting, or dancing, or whatever, that's very artifact-connected creativity – that's very narrow. God uses it and there's a place for it, but it's much bigger than that.

My wife homeschooled and she was tremendously creative in connecting with the kids. People with mercy ministries who can go into risky mission and connect and speak to people, that's a huge example of a creativity that we don't appreciate.

What would you say to encourage the Christian who makes music or other kinds of art?

Spend twice as much time with your Bible as your instrument. I'm starting to sound like my father and my grandfather, but we need to get back to the Bible. The level of biblical illiteracy is shocking; it's unbelievable. So, if I had any advice, I would say fall back in love with the Scripture and realize that we know Jesus through the Bible. Does God speak to us as we meditate and speak to us through prayer? Obviously he does, but everything, even that, has to be checked up against the Bible.

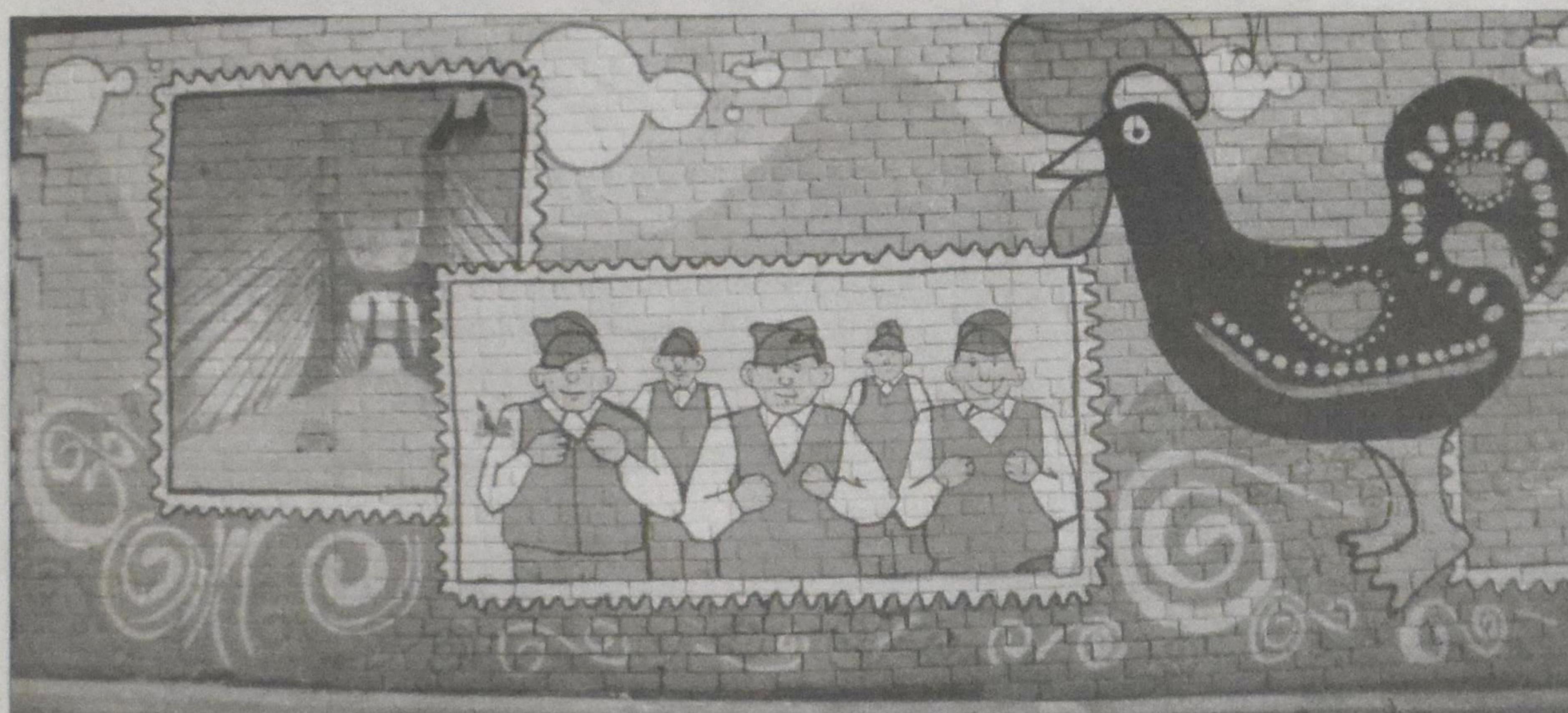
If you had to sum up your life and work thus far in one sentence, what would you say?

It would be [my mentor] Bill Lane's line: "Let the excellence of your work be your protest." Thirty-five years ago I was walking with Bill and I was being so critical of other people and what they were doing and Bill said, "Why don't you stop criticizing, and let the excellence of your work be your protest." Do what you do well, and let that be the protest against what you see. ➤

Peter Frieswick (peter.frieswick@gmail.com) is currently a MA English Creative Writing student at the University of New Brunswick. As a writer and a Christian he seeks to create imaginative work that has artistic and spiritual integrity.



Features

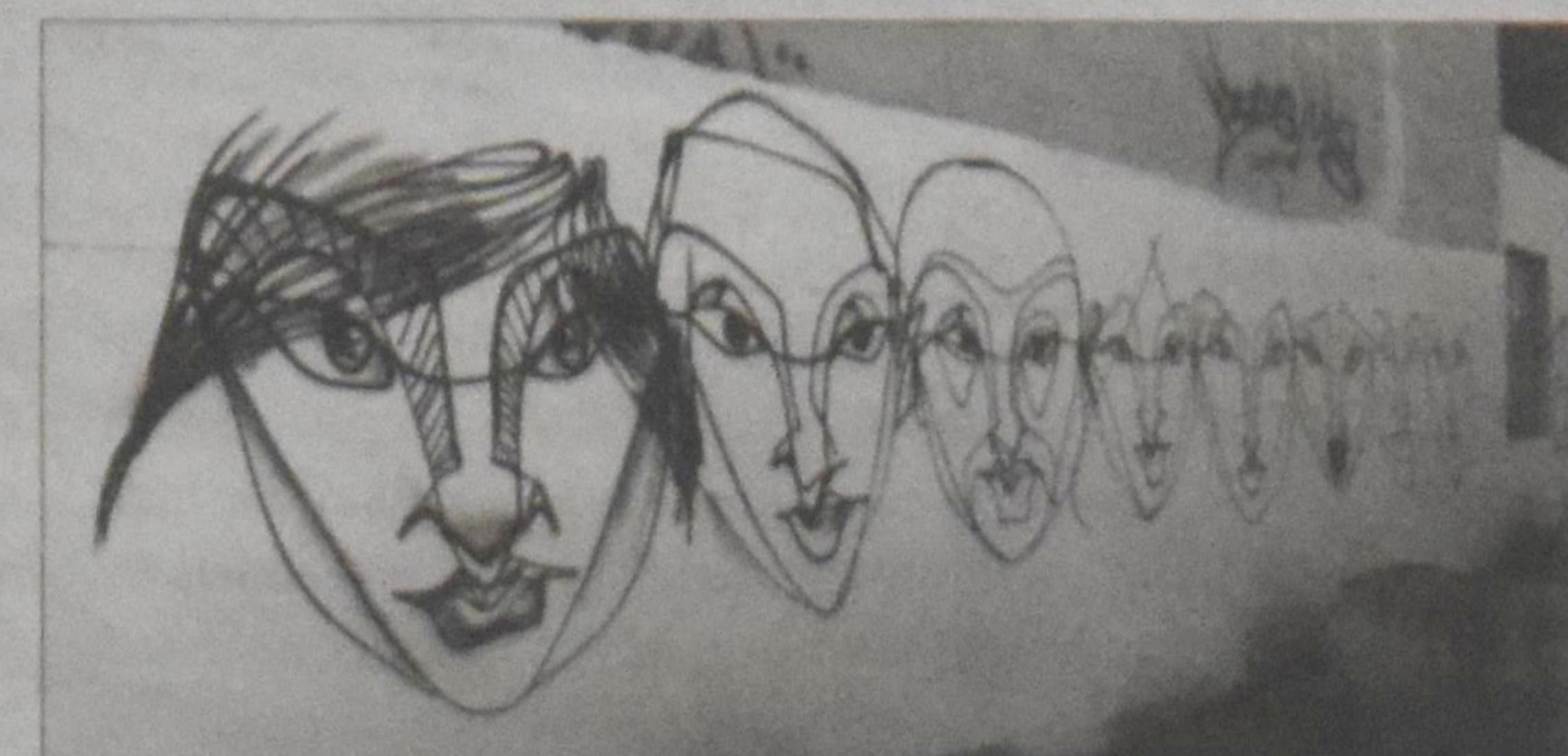
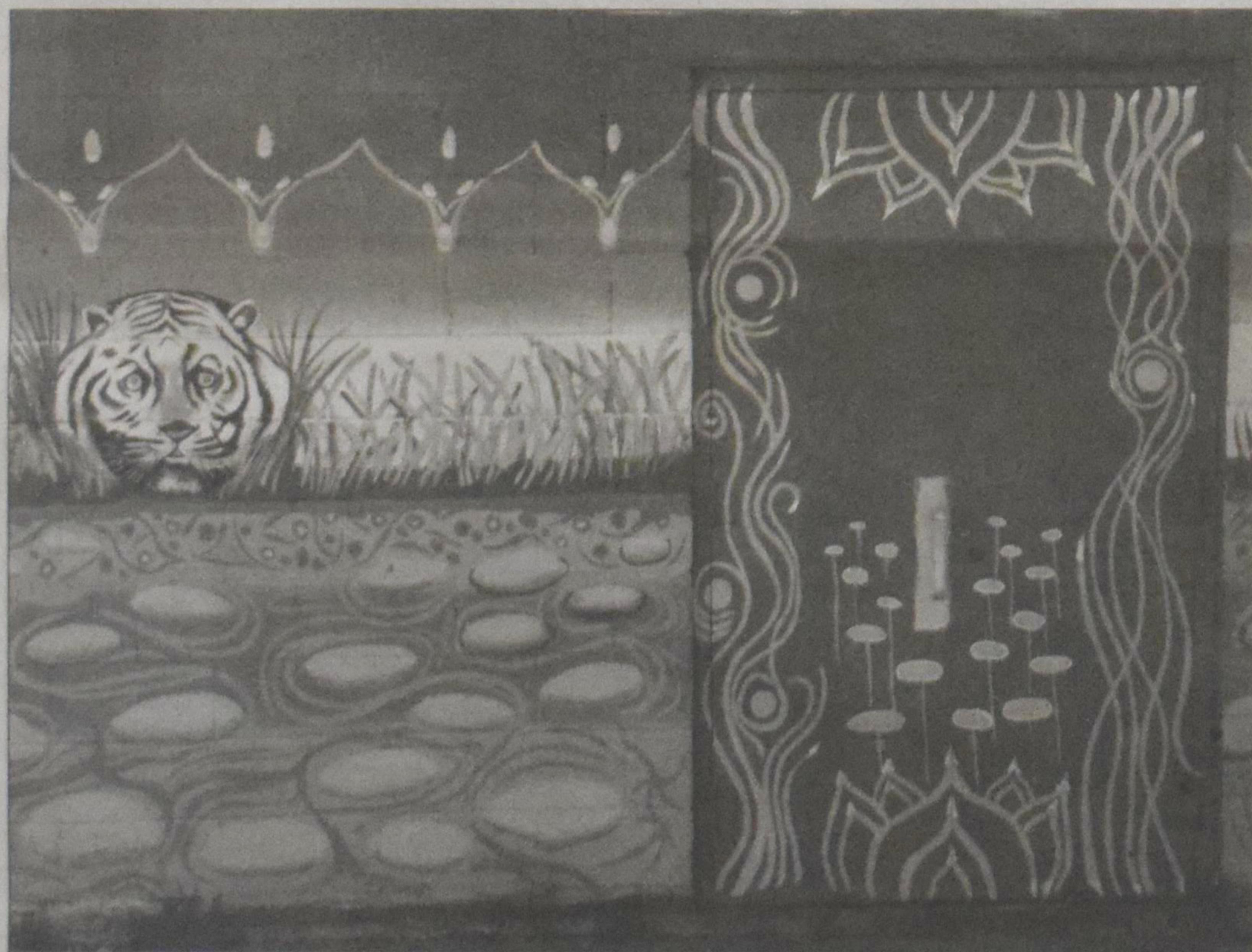


The city is a gallery

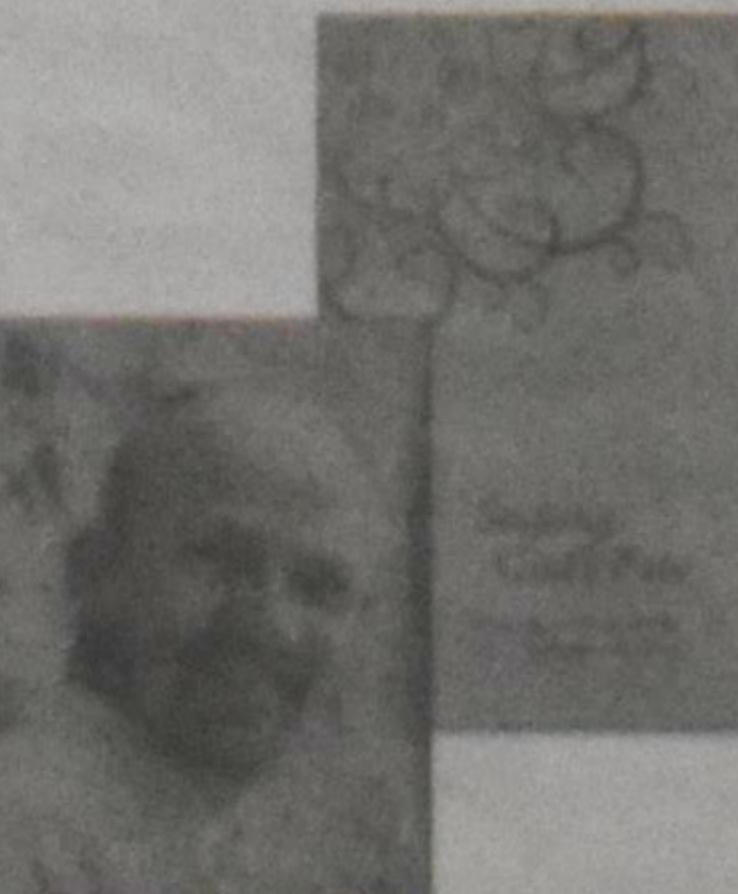
Phil Reinders

While Toronto has an assortment of very fine galleries and a bevy of smaller galleries, I'm convinced the whole city is a gallery. And I don't simply mean the architecture, the built form of the city or the design of the urban landscape (which is a beautiful thing on its own).

I mean, quite literally, the city is a gallery. Art is everywhere in the public space, making for intriguing and lovely spaces. The other day I spent a few hours biking around my end of the city and it took a few hours to cover just blocks of the west end because I couldn't stop snapping one shot after another of all the street art. Too much city; too little time. ☺



Phil Reinders recently took the call to serve Knox Presbyterian Church in downtown Toronto, enjoying the challenge of connecting the gospel to a postmodern urban city. Along with photography, Phil loves to write and has written the prayer book *Seeking God's Face*. He blogs at squinch.net.



Features

Augustine and the arts

Bert den Boggende

Augustine (354-430), bishop of Hippo, not only strongly influenced the Middle Ages, but was also, as Calvin College professor James Smith called him, the "patron saint of the Reformers." However, his influence on the arts was ambiguous. This ambiguity must be understood against the background of his experiences as a young man. As he confessed in *City of God*, "I used to go to sacrilegious shows and entertainments. I watched the antics of madmen; I listened to singing boys; I thoroughly enjoyed the most degrading spectacles put on in honour of gods and goddesses . . . (while) the lowest kind of actors sang . . . songs unfit for the ears of even the mother of one of those mountebanks."

Music

Augustine's world included the chanting of the Psalms and harvest songs. The early church, continuing the synagogue tradition of Psalm singing, added new hymns, including the *Gloria* and *Te Deum*. Bishop Ambrose, his mentor, introduced exciting new eastern melodies that impressed Augustine so much that he introduced this congregational singing into his own church. Music, he thought, was a divine gift. To sing was to pray twice. However, the missal chant *Exultet* for Holy Saturday has been wrongly ascribed to him.

In connection with the Psalms, Augustine mentioned musical instruments such as tympanum, psalterium and cithara. While other early church leaders wanted to restrict their use, Augustine saw them as tools to praise God. Music had a specific purpose: "David was a man highly skilled in songs, a man who loved the harmony of music. But David was not the ordinary man for whom music is merely a pleasure; for him it served the purpose of his faith. He used it in the service of his God." Augustine seems to reject music as a pleasure for itself and, like Plato, placed some restrictions on music. While acknowledging there was "delight given to the ears by the instruments of music and the melodies of all kinds that man has discovered," he seems to have taken greater delight in a more abstract approach. In *De musica* he suggested an intimate connection between numbers and music, an idea that attracted attention in the Renaissance, treating music as a matter of mathematical law: true appreciation consisted in knowing the intervals and harmony of the universe.

Architecture and painting

Hippo possessed large public buildings, but Augustine rarely commented on architecture. He was not wholly insensitive, though, calling Syracuse a "splendid city." He made both positive and negative observations about the arts. In *City of God* he remarked, "There are all the important arts discovered and developed by human genius, some for necessary uses, others simply for pleasure. Think of the wonderful inventions of clothing and building. Think

of the variety, in conception and accomplishment, man has shown in pottery, in sculpture, in painting; the marvels in theatrical spectacles, in which man's contrivances in design and production have excited wonder in the spectators and incredulity in the minds of those who heard of them."

At other times Augustine came close to what the Council of Elvira in 305 proclaimed: "There shall be no pictures in church, lest what is revered and adored be depicted on the wall." In *Confessions* he noted that painting and sculpture were an "excessively clever but useless activity." Pagan artists, he lamented, surrounded the people with filthy paintings such as Jupiter and a nude Danae (common also in the Renaissance). Although he did not oppose all representations (he called a depiction of the stoning of Stephen a "very sweet painting"), he showed little interest in the decoration of his churches. In fact, he disliked the imaging of God; such imaging was misleading and should not be displayed in church. He also sneered at those who sought Christ and the apostles on painted walls.

Much of Augustine's negativism is related to a fear of idolatry. As far as he was concerned, "It is by the gospel that the carved and the moulded images, that is, the idols of false gods, have been abolished; and we already see them consigned to oblivion, as if to the tomb," a sentiment repeated by Luther. Although he sometimes preached against images, he argued

that believers should get rid of them in their imaginations. Unlike the zealous Donatists, who were the real idol breakers, Augustine proclaimed tolerance and safety of property, defending Christians who didn't search out and destroy idols. The liquidation of the cultic apparatus, he posited, belonged to the state. Nevertheless, he was willing to use pagan temple material for new churches.

Literature

While Augustine "hated the Greek tongue," he "really liked Latin."

There is an interesting contrast in his references to literature between

his *Confessions* and his *City of God*. In *Confessions* he valiantly tried to suppress his enjoyment of literature, while in *City of God* he frequently quotes ancient poets by name, notably Virgil "the best and the most renowned of all poets." Before his conversion he was so strongly influenced by Cicero, notably his *Hortensius*, that the Bible seemed to him "unworthy to be compared with the majesty of Cicero."

After his conversion he had different priorities and felt led astray by the liberal arts, exclaiming that the morality displayed in the classics was woeful. In other words, he was trying to distance himself from his pre-conversion period. In *City of God* he had totally different purposes, including showing the immorality of Roman literature. For instance, he posited that the Romans granted poets license to slander and defame the gods, thinking that obscenities honoured the gods. While the Roman authors honoured

Lucretia's suicide after her rape (frequently portrayed in the Renaissance), Augustine condemned her decision. He does not really condemn literature as such, but particular contents. His real concern becomes apparent in a section dealing with Egyptian history that ends with "works of secular literature which, whether true or false, offer nothing of value to help us to a life of righteousness and felicity."

Theater

Augustine directed his strongest condemnation at the theatre. In his youth he developed a passion for stage plays. After his conversion he regarded the plays as "disgusting spectacles of frivolous immorality" and their obscene performances as having a disastrous effect on moral standards of Christians as well as the Roman Empire. He acknowledged that there were acceptable dramatic compositions, such as comedies and tragedies, that were free from verbal obscenities, but their subject matter was still immoral. Mimes, revue artists, gladiators, charioteers, wild animal fighters and epheta players were all condemned because of their involvement in lascivious impropriety. His verdict may have been inspired by a pastoral concern: Hippo had a sumptuous theatre, a stadium and an amphitheater. Augustine's condemnation contributed significantly to the disappearance of the theatre for about half a millennium. Possibly he connected dancing with these pagan excesses and hence it came in for condemnation as well.

Art theory

In *De musica*, Augustine engaged in discussions on art as imitation and beauty. According to Augustine, art was a kind of knowledge, a rational mental activity and, as with all rational activity, art was done for its own sake and its end was to discover truth. Apparently he was the first person to hold this perspective. In his *City of God* he spoke about "Intelligent Beauty" and described God as the "most Beautiful," ideas based on Scripture, such as Psalm 104:1 (Septuagint), "You have clothed yourself in praise and beauty." His motive was to praise the Creator. He related beauty to delight (beautiful things appeal to the eye), making it dependent on equality, unity, order, symmetry and likeness. Although his idea of beauty is strongly Platonic, his theoretical motive was to bring art and God into a comprehensive relation.

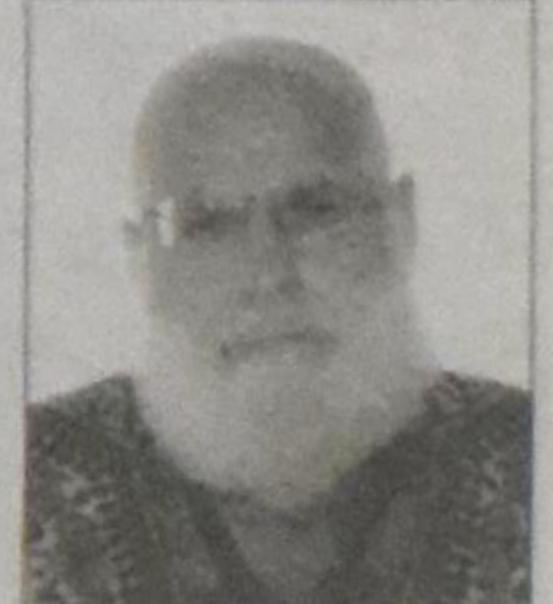
Concluding remarks

Augustine, living in a very simple environment, was one of the greatest artists of the mind. As a youth he loved the arts; as a believer he struggled with their contents. His condemnation of the theatre and dancing was similar to the CRC's synodical decisions in the 1920s and many Christians still feel uncomfortable with these arts. He loved literature, but condemned its frequent immorality. His pastoral concerns still seem valid; J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* may not be a suitable read for everyone. While he provided a Christian basis for the arts and his esthetics greatly influenced the ensuing centuries, his Platonic understanding of beauty as the kernel of art – an understanding shared by Abraham Kuyper and Hans Rookmaaker – is, as Calvin Seerveld has argued, misguided. Augustine exhibited a wariness of art, which in his later years showed signs of puritanism. ▶

Bert den Boggende has a Ph.D. in British history and is a retired teacher. He lives in Brooks, AB.



St. Augustine, Antonello da Messina, c. 1472.



Columns



Marian Van Til



Have you ever uttered with David, "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" (Ps. 13). Do you wonder whether you can "endure to the end and be saved"? (Matt. 24:13). Or even if you're saved at all?

It's difficult. Following Jesus means taking up our crosses in the manner of our Master. Carrying a cross may (and possibly should) strike terror in us unless we are simultaneously leaning on Jesus. Using another biblical metaphor: following him requires wearing armour, the whole armour of God. You don't put on armour unless you're about to go to battle. We are, indeed, engaged in the cosmic, ages-old war between Christ and Satan. Satan has long been prowling the earth seeking those he might devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

But we know who wins! That is crucial Good News. The Lamb who was slain has overcome! "The kingdoms of this world" who are in league with Satan "make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings – and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers" (Rev. 17:14). Even when we feel alone, or literally are, as Christ followers, Jesus himself gives us peace. He says, "Take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

What we're talking about here is what Calvinism calls *the perseverance of the saints* (the "P" in TULIP). If we want to "finish the race" we *must* persevere – and God will preserve "our going out and our coming in" forever. Paul tells the Philippians and us, "Continue to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (2:12). It does require work. But, thanks be to God, it is he himself who "works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (v. 13).

A crown laid up for me

In an ever more hostile world, confirming in us the sure knowledge that we belong to Christ, and successfully battling Satan's wiles is not caused first by *our* perseverance but by God's persevering grace working in our lives. He will make sure that Satan does not, will not, cannot, "snatch us out of his hand" (John 10:28). It is God who chose us as his own before the foundation of the world, and God who will enable us to say with Paul, in spite of severe testing, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge, will award me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

But what of Christ-followers who seriously sin? And what of those who seemed to flourish in faith but whither away, bearing no fruit? "The regenerate are not entirely free from sin," the Canons of Dort remind us. We succumb to Satan's temptations in ways large and small. Yet God is rich in mercy and does not take his Spirit from us. He preserves in us "his imperishable seed from which [we] have been born again, lest it perish or be dislodged" (CoD, 5th point of doctrine, Art. 7). At the same time, however, we must repent.

As for those who appear to follow Christ but in

Satan will not snatch you from my hand



Augustine affirmed that perseverance "even to the end is a gift from God."

whom the gospel seed does not sprout, God judges the heart; he knows his own. We can only pray for mercy. But it is not possible for God's elect to "lose" their salvation. God preserves his own for himself, in all circumstances, even to death. This is a truth that "Satan hates, the world ridicules, the ignorant and the hypocrites abuse and the spirits of error attack. The Bride of Christ [the church], on the other hand, has always loved this teaching very tenderly and defended it steadfastly as a priceless treasure; and God, against whom no plan can avail and no strength can prevail, will ensure that she will continue to do this" (CoD, 5th point, Art. 15).

November 4 was All Saints Sunday, when this truth comes to the fore. A 20th century hymn by Fred Pratt Green asks us to rejoice in how the saints through the ages live and witness to the world. Do you see yourself as one of them? You may. You are safe in God's hands!

*Rejoice in God's saints today and all days!
A world without saints forgets how to praise.
Their faith in acquiring the habit of prayer,
their depth of adoring, Lord,
help us to share.*

*Some march with events to turn them God's way;
some need to withdraw, the better to pray;
some carry the Gospel through fire and through
flood; our world is their parish,
their purpose is God.*

*Rejoice in those saints, unpraised and unknown,
who bear someone's cross or shoulder their own:
they share our complaining, our comforts, our
cares; what patience in caring,
what courage is theirs!*

*Rejoice in God's saints today and all days!
A world without saints forgets how to praise.
In loving, in living, they prove it is true:
their way of self-giving, Lord,
leads us to you.*

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editor living in Youngstown, N.Y.

ARTFUL EYE



WAITING FOR TRANSCENDENCE

In the waiting room patients hunch over
diseased magazines,
avoiding one another's eyes
like men outside a strip club.

The Renoir girl on the opposite wall irritates me.
Cliché of cookie tins and cloth journals,
she sits perfectly composed against a backdrop
of pink and white blooms.

In our cubicle the flesh pink plastic window blinds
war with sand-coloured walls.
Garbage bins in the hallway tilt on wheels.
Abandoning our celebrities and their crises,
we stare despondently at the grey carpet.

Desperate for a glimpse of transcendence
I return to Renoir's girl.
How is it I have never noticed before
the way her white fan accentuates
her luminous skin and gentle eyes?

Other forms beckon on the table:
love lives of starlets,
tantalizing sensuality of desserts
under headlines promising vitality
and relational bliss
in hot pink fonts,
with a bit of celebrity scandal thrown in
to make me feel complacent.

I have read them all over the decades.
Only the names change.

The girl on the wall draws my eye upward.
Embodyment of purity and innocence,
her white fan held up like a blessing.
Have mercy on us, angel of the waiting room!

Marianne Jones

Photo: Renoir's Girl with Fan, c. 1881.



Marianne Jones is a member of
the League of Canadian Poets.
Her workshop, "Poetry, Music and
Metaphor," has been presented to high
school classes and literary festivals.
Her collection of poetry, *Here, on the
Ground*, is available from the author:
mariannejones.net

Columns



Arlene Van Hove



Q. I am 17 and a senior high school student at a public school. I live at home with my parents and two younger siblings. We are Catholic and attend mass every week. During the last few years, I have become very sensitive to the wall plaques of Jesus hanging on the cross that we have throughout our house. Some of them were given to my mother by her parents. I remember asking my mother one day, when I was much younger, why we have these plaques on our walls. My mother told me they reflect her and my father's values. While that may be so, it does not work for me. Lately, I am not comfortable inviting my friends over from school even though they have seen the plaques lots of times. It seems like I don't feel comfortable in my own skin anymore. I have brought it up with my mother at least twice in the last four months, but she refuses to get into a

Mom, Dad...I'm not comfortable with that

discussion. She just tells me this is her home and someday I will have a home of my own and then I can do what I want.

A. I understand your frustration in trying to resolve a troubling issue and not being heard. If the plaques represent your mother's values, that can mean a lot of things we are not privy to. However, your response to the crucifixions is about your personal faith journey. So, I am curious what you see when you look at Jesus hanging on the cross. Do you see the brutality of his suffering? Do you see the face of a stern God who demands justice for the sins of the world? Ask yourself: what do I see when I look at Jesus hanging on the cross?

I would also suggest you do not minimize your sensitivity about the images when you were young. Try to remember what you saw when you looked at Jesus hanging on the cross at that time.

The next step is to ask yourself how you interpret what you see or what meaning

you make out of what you see. Be honest with yourself. A lot of Christians interpret Jesus' death on the cross as a gift from God so that all those who believe in him can be saved. This meaning can gloss over the horrific nature of the crucifixion, since some Christians are comforted by seeing the suffering Jesus in this way. For you it is a different story. You are, in your own words, uncomfortable with what you see. So, ask yourself: what meaning do I make of seeing Jesus hanging on the cross?

If you still abhor the plaques after gaining some self-awareness about why you feel this way, then I suggest you tell your parents you want to talk with them. I also encourage you to be part of the solution. Tell your parents that you respect their faith. Let them know you are on your own faith journey and some things are troubling you at this time in your life. Tell them you are hoping for a compromise so you can be more comfortable at home. Then let them

know how plaques depicting Jesus hanging on the cross make you feel. I suggest you not get involved in theological discussions at this time. Just move forward. Ask them if it would be possible to remove them in the shared areas of the house for a year, after which time you will be more than happy to talk with them again to see how you are doing.

I know the above suggestions can be intimidating for a 17 year old. And yes, it takes courage on your part. But it is quite common for parents and teenagers or young adults to think vastly different from one another in terms of their faith.

Should your parents not want to talk with you, I suggest you ask a respected and caring adult friend to intervene on your behalf.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and member of the Fleetwood CRC.

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith



War Horse

\$200. That's what it cost me to see *War Horse* last month. Bus fare, ticket, meals, driver's tip. I'm reading Shane Claiborne's *The Irresistible Revolution* right now, so I'm wincing at the admission. His remarks about consumerist Christians feel up close and personal.

But let me tell you about *War Horse*. I've read the book, seen the movie, but "the play's the thing." The story starts small with the love of a boy for his horse, but ripples out concentrically, encompassing the family, Albert, his alcoholic father and long-suffering mother, the village, with its petty rivalries, and, finally, the whole world, nations engaging in the cataclysmic confrontation of the first World War. Within these overlapping circles, the enduring questions keep bumping against each other: the whys and what ifs.

With minimal staging, we were cleverly ushered into farmyards, village squares and even battlefields. I loved how scythes could become fences simply by turning them over and butting them together, farmers becoming immobile posts. I loved how stringing pennants up into the audience could rope us effortlessly into a celebratory town meeting, the recruiter cajoling us with stirring patriotic rhetoric. "It'll all be over by Christmas!" he vows. This is the pulse of drama, suggestiveness coupled with imagination, disbelief suspended. Thomas Merton said, "Art enables us to find ourselves and lose

ourselves at the same time." And it's true. I'm there, ready to sign up for King and country.

A screen above the stage, like a huge torn scrap of paper, afforded further orientation. Simple pencil drawings, sketched live, outlined the geography – patchworked pastures and village rooftops. Archival film footage of the crossing of the English Channel and the twisted, charred tree trunks of No Man's Land lent sobering realism. But abstract images were equally powerful: a single red drop spreading like blood on the white canvas, dripping, metamorphosing into poppies with quavering paper-thin petals slipping off the edge.

The puppetry is the wizardly part of the production. It's beyond description, really – life-sized horses operated with flawless choreography by agile puppeteers. In seconds you're mesmerized, hoodwinked, believing the horses are real, every snort and hoof beat credible. They even breathe. The puppetry, not only with respect to the horses but also the larks, crows and a comical goose, represents a phenomenal achievement.

Celtic folk songs smoothed the transitions between scenes, universal and timeless ballads of mothers, wives and sweethearts longing for their men to come home, for their families to be reunited, for the fighting to be over. The plaintive melodies were juxtaposed against the deafening din of battle scenes, the booming artillery reverberating with terrible authenticity. Music,

noise and silence combined to generate a subliminal kinesthetic commentary – physiological meaningfulness penetrating muscle and bone.

With the eyes of Jesus

Was the \$200 well-spent? I marveled at the talent and ingenuity of the production, my awe undergirded by praise and adoration for a creative God, the God whom we image in every artistic human endeavour. T.S. Eliot, in *Choruses from the Rock*, sums it up so elegantly: "The LORD who created must wish us to create / And employ our creation again in His service / Which is already His service in creating." Amen and amen.

But, further, I'm grateful for any artistic expression that allows us to not only lose ourselves, but to find ourselves, to perceive the multiplicity of our own being – the wild amalgam of nobility and degradation, holiness and profanity that we are – because such discovery can propel us toward the "other," the neighbour who is not so different from us, after all. The fact that Joey, the war horse with an oh-so-human name, served on both sides of the combat deliberately places such recognition in the crosshairs of our consciousness. As we gaze upon the fractures in Albert's family and in Europe, upon the dead and dying horses in the mud of Flanders, we also see the cracks and fissures in our own families, in our own neighbourhoods and in our world. But as Christians, we're invited to look with the

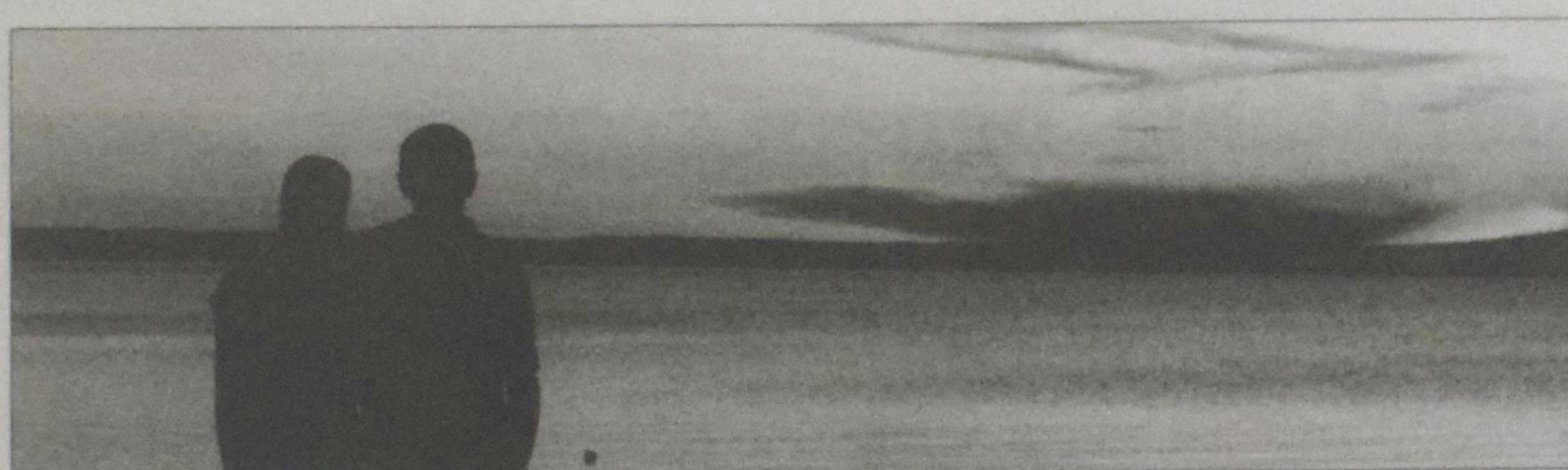


Puppetry in the play War Horse was a phenomenal achievement.

eyes of Jesus, the Saviour who ignites redemption and restoration through Incarnation, the supreme example of embracing the "other," divine embracing human. What Marilynne Robinson said about fiction is true of all the arts: "I think fiction may be, whatever else, an exercise in the capacity for imaginative love, or sympathy, or identification."

Exiting the theatre, a turbaned teenager stepped back to allow me to leave ahead of him. I smiled and thanked him. It was . . . priceless. And when I got home, Shane's book still on my night table, I wrote a cheque for our church's school-building project in Belize: my heart stretched, perhaps, by this exercise of its capacity for imaginative love.

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is features editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.

Columns

Bert Hielema

Jesus' wife?

A Harvard Divinity School professor recently identified a scrap of papyrus, dating from about 400 AD, on which Jesus addresses a woman as "my wife." Was

he married? No. Jesus embodies the New Creation. He himself has said that in the New Creation there is no marriage. So that answers that, but what about the relationship between women and men? Will the New Creation be populated with sex-less creatures? I think not.

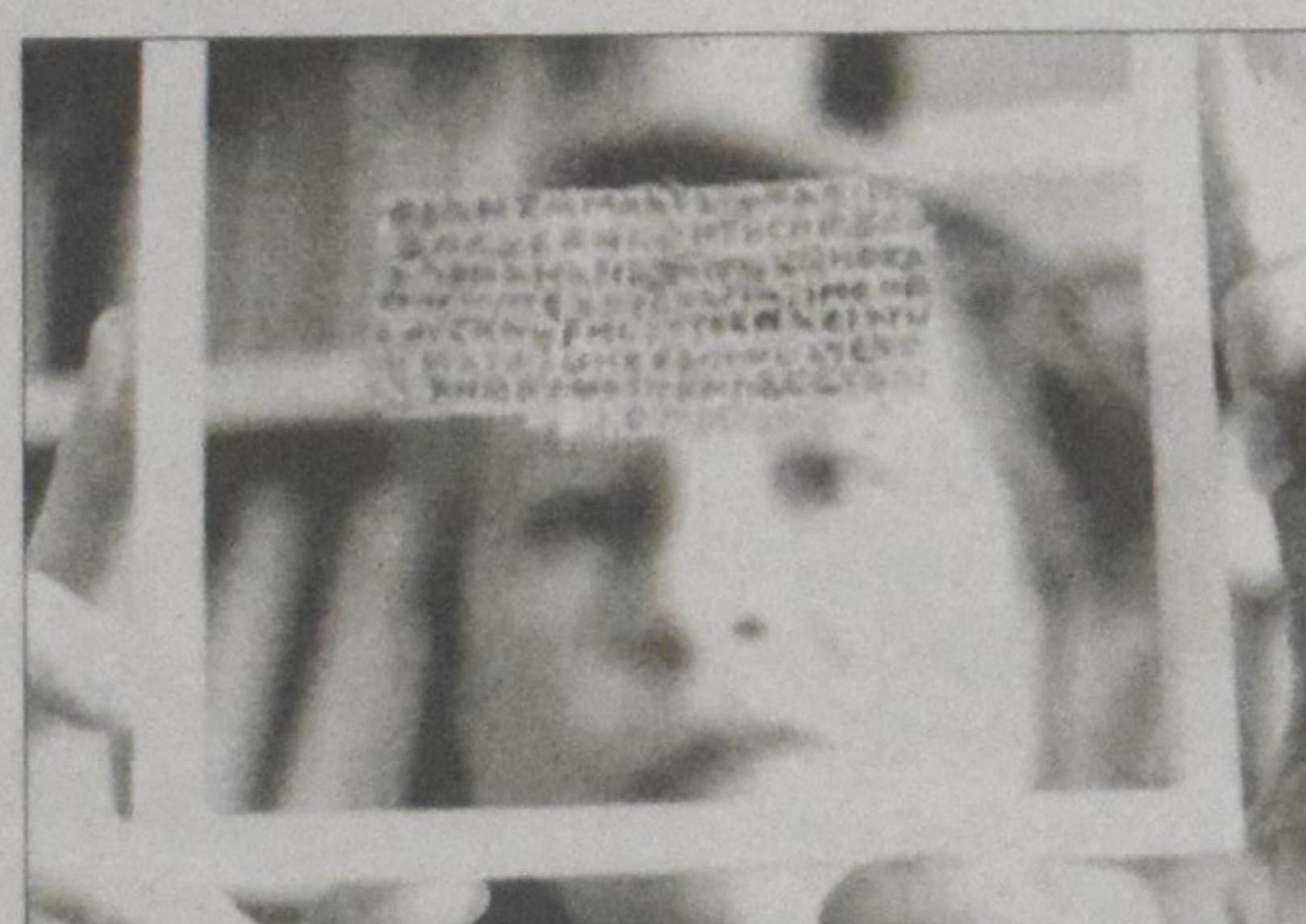
I wouldn't be here if it weren't for sex, and neither would anybody, including Jesus, who was born from the Holy Spirit and Mary. Yet sex is a taboo topic in the church. For far too long the church has regarded the human body as an enemy to be conquered. The *Song of Songs* is not a song of disembodied, spiritual, intellectual aspiration, but one of erotic, bodily love, something at the heart of God's creation, a downright earthly song of love.

C.S. Lewis wrote *The Four Loves*. He identified them as *Storge* (affection), *Philia* (friendship), *Eros* (romance), and *Agapé* (unconditional love). I believe that Jesus experienced all these four loves, yes, including *Eros*, romance. Is there something wrong with Jesus falling in love? After all he was like us in everything but sin. Falling in love is no sin. Does that mean that he too went through a *Sturm und Drang* phase as a teenager? Of course.

As a Reformed and reforming person I know my doctrine. The Heidelberg Catechism question 35 says that "He was like us in everything but sin"; the Belgic Confession also states (Article 26) "He made himself completely like his brothers (and sisters)." Hebrew 4:15 confirms this. Ever heard a sermon on this subject? I haven't, and I have been going to church for 80 years, something a lot of people have ceased to do: perhaps because questions like these are not dealt with.

Common grace in Greenpeace

I believe that preaching, a form of one-sided broadcasting, is outdated. So what sort of church service might work better? After a prominent period of praise and prayer, sermons (either previously posted online or distributed the Sunday before) should be deliberated upon in small groups to promote animated conversations. Lectures are the least effective way of learning. Of course,



Prof. King of Harvard claims this papyrus fragment mentions Jesus' wife.

Bible knowledge is prerequisite for such intelligent discourse. "Who do you say I am," Jesus asked his followers, stimulating discussion. Descartes long ago coined *Cogito ergo sum*: "I think therefore I am." Sermons suffer under this mindset: explaining Bible passages with proof texts, and reducing them to unilateral academic exercises. Jesus, on the other hand, related to life, saying in essence *Homo sum, ergo sum*: "I am a human being, that's why I am."

Both J. H. Bavinck and Dietrich Bonhoeffer tell us time and again that God, earth and us humans form an unbreakable covenant, attached to the earth with every element of our existence. We came from earth and to earth we will return. Jesus' humanity was evident in everything, including upsetting the money men in the temple, something I compare to Greenpeace preventing the slaughter of the whales. Yet we often ridicule or, worse, ignore those who fight to preserve our natural habitat. No wonder Bonhoeffer approvingly quotes Martin Luther's famous line, that "The godless man's curse can be more pleasing to God than the hallelujahs of the pious." To me this means that these non-Christians, by trying to save one of God's unique creatures, could be closer to doing God's work than the ever-decreasing numbers attending church services. Christ's favourite self-description, after all, is *Son of Man*. He was human through and through. We find that a bit frightening, because we would rather keep Jesus somewhere up there. Sermons that fail to connect with the here and now, and with the world and those who dwell therein, are often a waste of holy time and may even do more harm than good.

No, Jesus was not married. Yes, he experienced all human emotions: nothing human was foreign to him, except sin. That's why everybody, with whatever sexual orientation, can come to him, because he himself has been subjected to all possible experiences.

This column can also be found on hielema.ca/blog. His e-mail is bert@hielema.ca.

Words from Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin



This column piece comes out of widespread conversations regarding transgender issues. Most people, especially in the church, feel helplessly lost and alone with this issue. The situation is similar, I dare say, within secular society too! It doesn't have to be that way. When we don't understand something we can do one of two things: either educate ourselves, or put our heads in the sand and pretend it doesn't exist . . . or at least, not in our circles.

As I've talked with others and struggled on my own through this, I had to turn my gaze toward God. This is a complex issue. We can delve into science, biology, environmental factors and behaviour, and still come out asking "Why? Or how?" I have had to turn to God who, through his wisdom, pours out knowledge and understanding. We often want to present things in perfect packages. If you do A B C, then you'll get to Z and everything is fine. But this isn't reality. Life is complex and we don't have real answers other than to surrender ourselves and our lives at the cross. On transgender issues too, we need to understand that the cross of Jesus confronts the wisdom of the world. And the way of the cross doesn't promise life will be easy, or that we will have clear answers for everything.

I sensed God gave me a bit of an answer the other day. It wasn't a bright neon light answer, but rather a deeper, quieter response. I sensed God saying, "*What if biology plays a role in this? Did that mean I made a mistake? Do you realize that you live in a fallen/broken world? Could this extend to transgender issues?*"

We concur that with homosexual orientation, biology does play a role. We would be ignorant if we didn't believe that we could be born with a sensitivity toward struggling with gender, depending on our creative/sensitive/relational bent and factoring in the environment, interactions with our family unit, peers, how our perceptions speak to us and other factors.

Is this also true in regards to transgender issues? I can look at my own life and see that I was born with a more sensitive relational side, which caused me to gravitate toward females (who relate and communicate more freely). This environment, combined with the feedback and perceptions of my parents, family, peers, began to make me

Lost in transgender

feel like I was a mistake, born in the wrong body. How come I couldn't be a girl, like those I played with? I have a clear memory of trying on my mother's wedding dress and wondering what it would be like to be a woman. It excited me, and planted the notion that maybe, one day, I could be. Couple this with the disassociation toward my male peers and my attraction to guys, and my thoughts became consumed with having a sex change. For years I thought that my issue was strictly homosexuality, but the more I remember of my past, and my behaviours, thoughts and actions, I realize that it is only by the grace of God that I did not have gender reassignment surgery.

Love like never before

Through the healing process, I came to understand that long term contentment and happiness comes only from meeting Jesus, and giving over to him all the pain and confusion of my past. I had to trust him to be enough for me. I could have fixed my problems with surgery, reconstructing a different person, yet I'd still remain the same person genetically speaking. I can't change my DNA. God says that I am not a mistake, but that I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I had to come to peace with my gender and my identity. God formed us and said, "This is good." I do not have all the answers for the questions that transgender issues raise, but this is where I need to submit and depend on the Lord. He will give me wisdom and understanding, which supersedes the wisdom of the world.



God's grace saved me from gender reassignment surgery.

So to each of you who may encounter someone who is deciding to follow a path that you totally don't understand, but you see heartache and brokenness because you've encountered God in a way that has changed your perspective,

ask him for wisdom and understanding that makes the wisdom of man look foolish. Seek him first. Acknowledge him and he will direct your steps. Love those who have these deep struggles with gender and sexuality. They need encounters with Jesus Christ! Love like you've never loved before. You don't need an answer to love others; you don't need clichés; you just need to be dependent of your Father who will give you all you need through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which dwells within you.

Kenny Warkentin (kenny66@gmail.com) works full time as an urban missionary with Living Waters Canada and is an artist and musician. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife and daughter.

News

Energy boom will push U.S. past Saudi Arabia, benefit economy

The U.S. energy boom will boost jobs and capital spending, cut imports and carbon emissions, according to a new report. But the energy boom is not a panacea for the climate – or U.S. foreign policy.

Laurent Belsie (CMS)

The United States is in the midst of an energy boom that at the end of the decade will make it the world's top oil producer, temporarily displacing Saudi Arabia, and a net exporter of natural gas, according to a new report.

By 2030, America will be nearly energy self-sufficient on net and North America as a whole will become a net oil exporter, says the report released Monday by the International Energy Agency (IEA), a Paris-based research and advocacy group for oil-importing developed nations.

These are huge developments. Not since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the prospect of the so-called "peace dividend" of reduced military spending has the U.S. received such an unexpected economic boost. As long as the so-called "fracking" technology proves environmentally safe, the surge in unconventional oil and natural gas production will offer many benefits to the U.S. economy. Among them:

Jobs

The sector currently supports 1.7 million workers directly and indirectly and that will rise to nearly 3 million by 2020, according to IHS Global Insight, an economic forecasting firm based in Lexington, Mass. Many of those jobs will become available in some of the most rural and, until recently, economically depressed areas of the U.S.

Infrastructure spending: Wells will have to be drilled; pipelines and railroads built. In all, IHS Global Insight expects the U.S. to spend more than \$5.1 trillion in capital expenditures between 2012 and 2035 on unconventional oil and natural gas activity. That's a huge surge of investment. Nearly \$3 trillion will be devoted to natural gas alone.

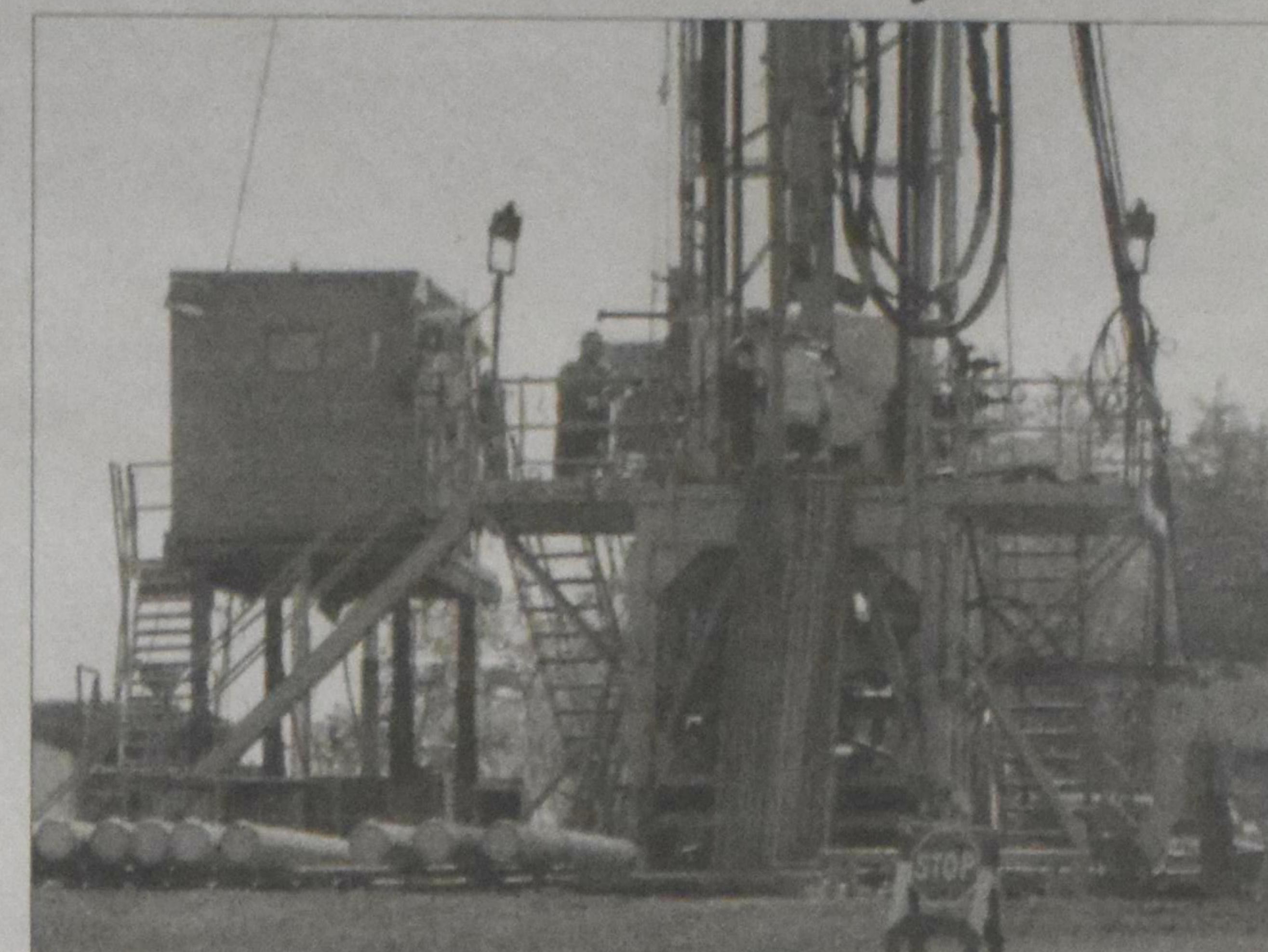
Currently, the U.S. relies on imports for 20 percent of its energy needs. Last year, as the world's largest oil importer, it spent a net \$327 billion to bring in foreign oil. As the U.S. moves toward energy efficiency, that's money

that will no longer be spent overseas and will flow, instead, largely to domestic producers.

A boom in gas production

Low prices and huge amounts of supply will increase natural gas use to the point that by around 2030 it overtakes oil as the dominant fuel in America's energy mix, according to the IEA forecast. With gas plants cheaper to run than coal-fired facilities, natural gas is already starting to supplant coal to produce electricity. But how much the surge in unconventional gas undercuts the future growth in coal depends, in part, on what happens in other parts of the world. At the moment, the U.S. is exporting coal to Europe because it's cheaper than higher-priced natural gas on the continent.

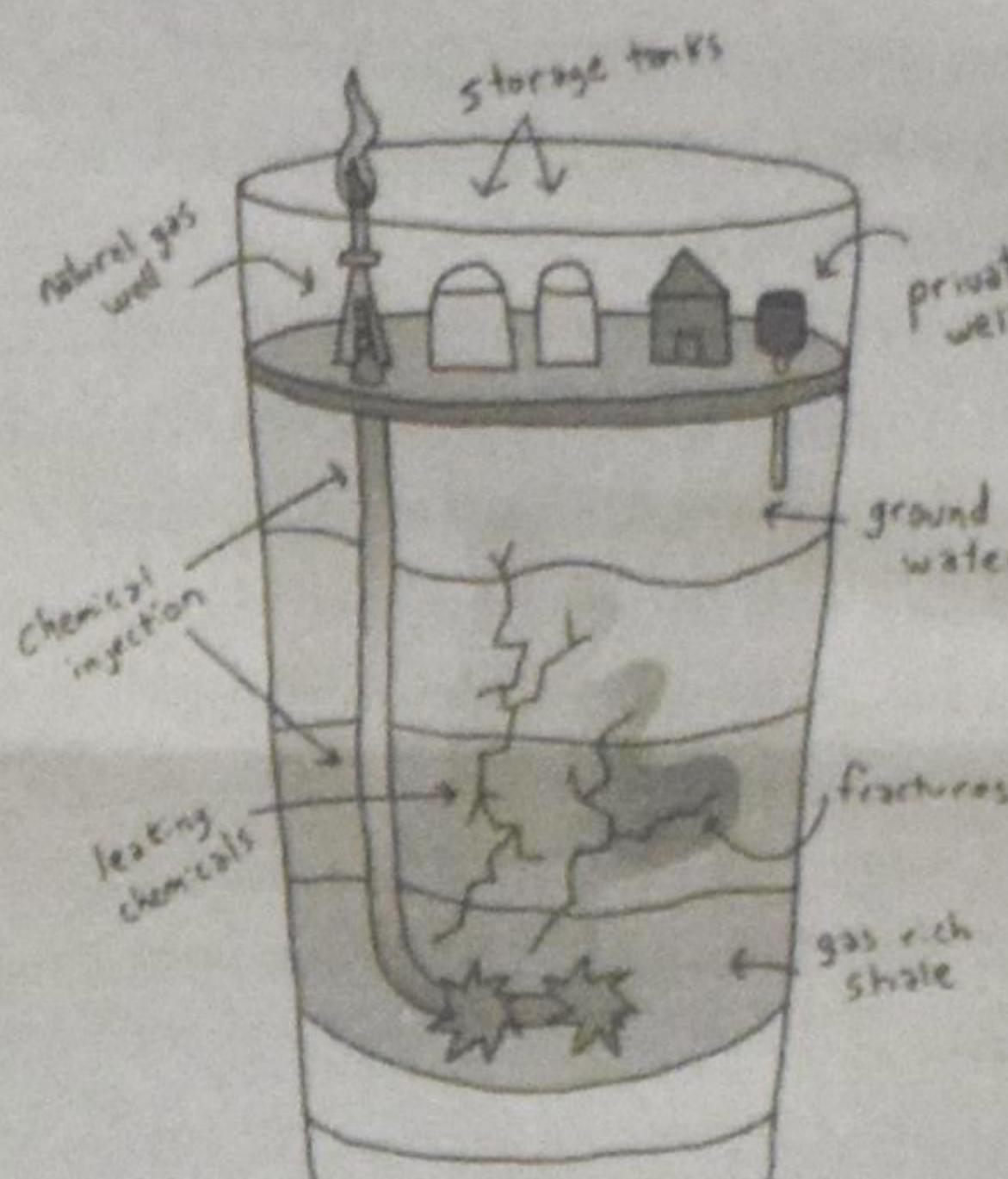
There are strategic advantages as well. The nation will become far less vulnerable to foreign oil embargoes or other disruptions of energy supplies, even before it becomes nearly self-sufficient.



In this June file photo, a crew works on a gas drilling rig at a well site for shale-based natural gas in Zelienople, Pa. Natural gas is a leading factor in the U.S. energy boom, which should cause the US to become nearly self-sufficient in energy on net by 2030, according to a new report.

For example: Merely reducing oil imports from today's 8.7 million barrels per day to 6 million b.p.d., the U.S. would effectively extend the buffer of its Strategic Petroleum Reserve from 80 days to 116 days, points out David Goldwyn, a former U.S. State Department special envoy for international energy and assistant secretary of energy, in an article for the *International Herald Tribune*.

There are also climate effects. America's move from coal to cleaner natural gas helped cut U.S. carbon dioxide emissions in the first quarter of 2012 to levels not seen since 1992, Mr. Goldwyn points out. If natural gas can supplant coal internationally, especially in China, the climate benefits would be huge



Drawing shows the fracking process and how water quality can be compromised.

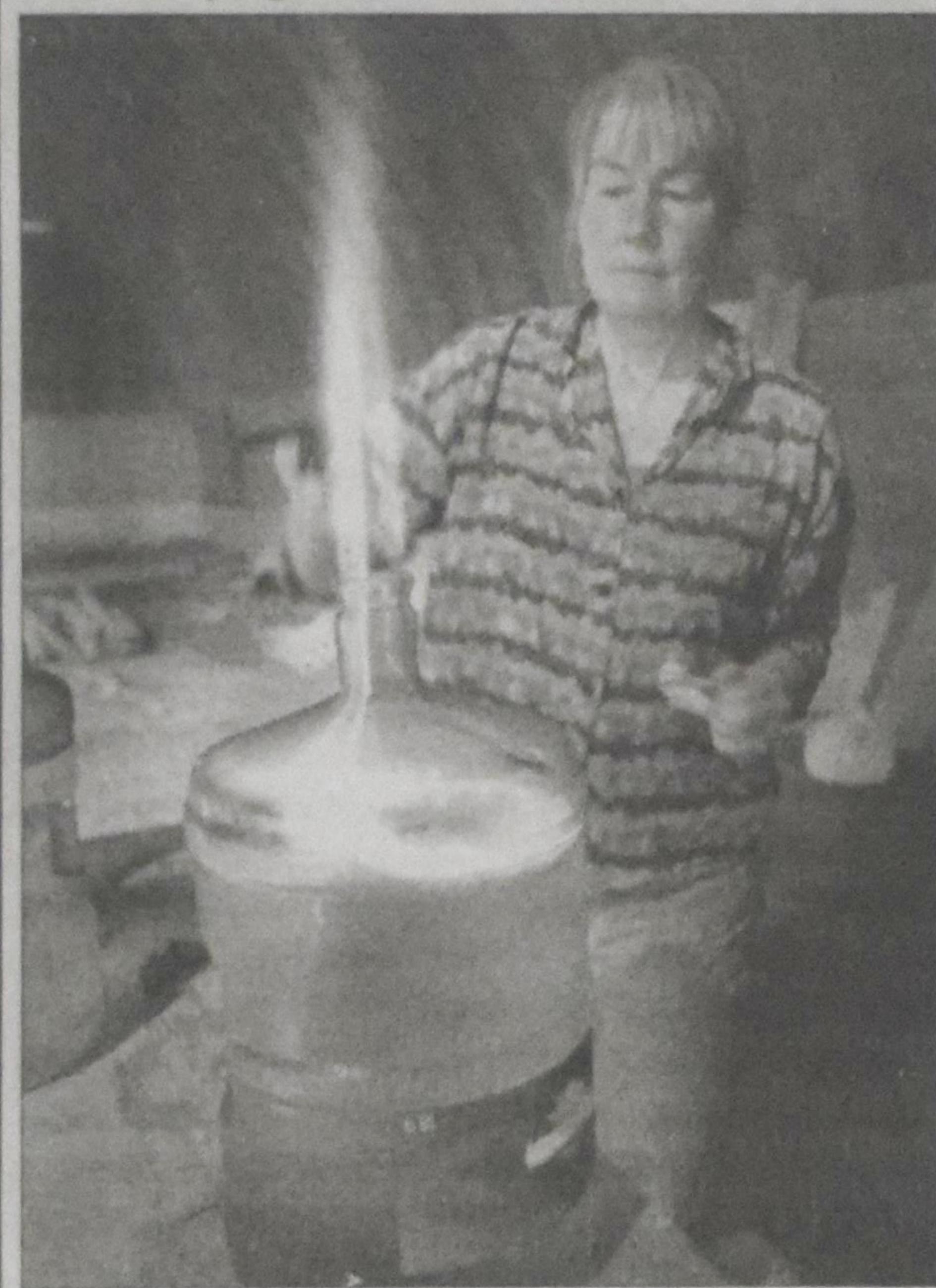
that a concerted global effort on energy efficiency could cut the growth in global energy demand in half through 2035 and cause oil demand to peak before 2020 and then fall substantially. Global output would rise a cumulative \$18 trillion, with the India, China, the U.S., and Europe reaping the biggest gains.

While the surge in unconventional oil and gas is expected to deliver many economic benefits, there are at least two things it won't do: 1) lower the price of oil – at least, not singlehandedly; and 2) free the U.S. from its geopolitical commitments to other nations in the Middle East, Europe, or Asia.

"Security always trumps economics in U.S. foreign policy," Goldwyn writes. "The country's commitment to global security and its vulnerability to global oil prices will keep Washington engaged for the foreseeable future."

What is fracking?

Fracking is a technique that involves the injection of millions of litres of water and thousands of litres of unidentified chemicals underground at very high pressure in order to create fractures in the underlying shale rock formations and extract



Jessica Ernst of Vulcan, Alberta, has so much natural gas in her water she can set it on fire.

the natural gas below the surface. Fracking for unconventional gas is rapidly expanding in the U.S. and almost every province across Canada.

The Council of Canadians opposes fracking. Fracking uses large quantities of water, has high carbon emissions, impacts human health, disrupts wildlife, and pollutes groundwater and local drinking water. It may also be responsible for minor earthquakes.

Victory for citizens

Recently citizens in the Niagara region were able to stop fracking waste from coming to Niagara Falls, N.Y. and being discharged through their water treatment plant and then into the Niagara River. Environmental and health concerns won out over the economical benefits.

Currently in Canada, a First Nation in B.C. is demanding the provincial government take more precautions before awarding water licences to companies for natural gas fracking. If the licences are approved, billions of litres of water will be drawn from rivers and lakes each year.

We need to do what is right for our children, and grandchildren. If fracking is a danger to health and the environment, then we must find alternatives.

Ineke Medcalf

A cleaner solution?

Of course, this is not the cleaner solution envisioned by environmentalists. Under their scenario, increasingly scarce oil would become more expensive, making "green" energy alternatives cost-competitive, leading to even more dramatic cuts in emissions. By contrast, the surge in oil and gas production means the U.S. and the world will remain reliant on fossil fuels for longer than expected.

Carbon tax

Governments could step in and encourage that switch toward renewables. Some economists are pushing for a carbon tax in the U.S. that would help make renewables more cost-competitive. The IEA forecasts

Laurent Belsie is a staff writer with Christian Science Monitor.

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<p>HAPPY 90TH BIRTHDAY (Dec 4) To our Mother "Nana"</p> <p>Corrie Vanderwoude</p> <p>with love from your children: Joan(Joe) Koole - Toronto Jill (Bill) Lise - Brampton Margaret Vanderwoude - Guelph Martin (Elyse) Vanderwoude - Hillsdale Renee(Tom) Bilodeau- Elmvale Cindy Crompton - Barrie 16 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren</p> <p>"The Lord will watch over your coming and going, both now and forevermore." Psalm 121:8</p> <p>Address: 509 - 7900 McLaughlin Rd S Brampton ON L6Y 5A7</p>	<p>It is truly a test of love When 60 years come and go And two people wake each morning As though it were their first.</p> <p>60 years ago on December 4, 1952,</p> <p>GERRIT VOS AND FOEKJE ZWAAGSTRA were united together in holy matrimony.</p> <p>The Lord has blessed them greatly and we, as their children, grandchildren and great-children, would all like to wish them lots of love and the Lord's blessings in the years to come.</p> <p>Thank you for the Godly example of marriage that you have shown us all!</p>	<p>Evert van Bolhuis</p> <p>At Hospice Simcoe with his family by his side on Monday, Nov. 12, 2012, at the age of 80 years.</p> <p>Ed was the beloved husband of Tryntje "Tina" (nee Huizenga).</p> <p>Loving father of Marian Speelman (Harry), Grace Helmus (Ralph), Jim van Bolhuis (Debbie), Teresa Simonse (Lawrence), Edward van Bolhuis (Janice), Linda Vandenberg (Home) and Yolande Vroom (Henry). Cherished grandfather of 19 and great-grandfather of four.</p> <p>A memorial service was held at Covenant Christian Reformed Church, Barrie. If desired, memorial donations made to Hospice Simcoe would be appreciated by the family. Condolences may be forwarded to www.steckleygooderham.com</p>	<p>Holiday accommodation in Holland with vehicle rentals and tours. Web: chestnutlane.nl</p> <p>Two Florida Homes for Rent Heated Pools 3 bed, 2 bath in beautiful Cape Coral Florida. Only 5 minutes apart. See the virtual tours at: http://tours.360vtour.net/66224?idx=1 or http://rtvpx.com/rst/RE-9831-PUG8XK-01 For more information and reasonable rates contact Glen at 519-863-6965 or e-mail: mgsikma@xplornet.com.</p>

Life Stories

Anita Brinkman

**Anita Brinkman**

Speaking with Herman Vellinga, it's hard not to catch some of his enthusiasm for life. At 71, he has a wide variety of life experiences behind him, but still he eagerly traces out signs of God's guidance, provision and blessing, like fingerprints on the pattern of his life. "There are so many things in life we have no control over – including to whom we're born, and where," he notes. "I was blessed with a good family; I'm so thankful for a Christian mother and father, because they taught me to love and follow God. Without them I would not have known." In his youth, Herman tried out for a travel baseball team; because it played on Sundays, his parents would not allow him to join. They explained to him the importance of spending the Lord's Day with family, going to church, observing the God's day. At the time, he was upset, even angry – but "it would have set a pattern for life," he notes. Instead, when a referendum was later held to discuss Sunday sports, Herman, still a teen, worked to keep the day set apart. "God uses life to mold us and shape us."

Three experiences with illness proved to be profound influences in Herman's life. "Some good came out of every one of those events – more dependence on God, more awareness that our lives are in his hands, a sense of his gifts," says Herman. "He gives us all something to do. He gives you a gift, he gives me a gift, and it all blends together. That's how it works." The first experience was a heart attack in September, 1981, when Herman was forty. He was twice declared dead; on being revived the second time, he told the attending nurses, "Every time I leave. . . it's beautiful!" He was again declared dead; but before a third revival, he heard

a voice. "Herman, you've had a foretaste of heaven, and it's yours. But not yet." It's an experience that has stayed with him ever since. A nurse later told him that every time they revived him, his face was aglow.

The following spring, Herman started speaking publicly about his experience, going to young couples' clubs, churches, and whoever extended an invitation. Before one meeting, he received a phone call asking him to pray with the caller for a couple that was planning to come to the meeting that night. They prayed together that the couple would come to know the Lord. Two weeks later, a woman approached him in a restaurant, and said, "You know when you got that call a few weeks ago? That was my son and his wife who came to know the Lord." The young man himself called some time later, wondering what church Herman recommended. Herman advised him to stay in the church he'd grown up in and "be the best Christian you can be in that church" and to that church.

In God's service

Another time, Herman felt that he needed to go talk to an acquaintance, Karl. "Over the next three or four months," says Herman, "we read scripture, prayed, laughed, and cried together. The Lord used that to bring him to salvation. I don't know how it works, but if we're in tune with the Holy Spirit, we don't need to understand it. We just need to be open to the leading of the Spirit. If we're truly open to it, God uses it to bring us where we need to be."

In 1987, Herman experienced another heart attack; because it was not a severe attack, he spent a few days in the intensive care unit, then moved to a ward, which he shared with Sam and Oliver. One night,

Sam was having difficulty, and called for a nurse. The nurses were out of earshot, so Herman made his way over and helped Sam. The next day, he heard Sam uttering a different cry for help – to God. Herman asked God, "Is now the time?" and felt the answer come back, "Yes."

He asked Sam, "Want me to read something for you?" Sam answered that he did. With no prior preparation, Herman opened to Psalm 103 and walked through it with Sam. At the end of the psalm, Herman awkwardly invited Sam to join him in the final line, "Praise the Lord!" Sam did. Later that day, Sam matter-of-factly said, "Hey, Herm, I became a Christian today." So excited, Herman called his wife to share the good news with her. They agreed that it would be good for Sam to share that news with someone else. By the time he got back from that phone call, he was just in time to help Sam make a phone call of his own. Once he was connected, the first words out of Sam's mouth were, "Hon, I became a Christian today."

He wondered how to connect with the other patient in the ward, a 65-year-old man with special needs. He saw that the man couldn't read, but loved to look at pictures in magazines. So Herman started sitting with Oliver, looking at books and magazines. Herman would point to a picture, and Oliver would say what it was.



"If we're not here for each other," Herman says, "what are we here for?"

Sometimes Oliver or both men would sing together to pass the time. If there was any doubt that he was getting through to Oliver, it was erased the afternoon that Oliver took one of his mid-afternoon snack cookies, walked it over, and gave it to Herman. "These unexpected things make life so much richer," says Herman. "If we're not here for each other, what are we here for? We don't often get to experience these moments, but they're gifts. Whatever gifts the Lord has given, we need to determine what they are and where we can be of service to him."

For the past eight years, Herman's main place of service has been the stroke recovery unit of the local hospital. After a stroke in 2003, he continued to visit a couple of friends he had made. His weekly visits caught the attention of the rehabilitation director, who suggested regular volunteering. He now works with recent stroke victims, encouraging them to hold on to hope. To them, and to all of us, he concludes, "We never know what life has in store for us, and it's a good thing we don't. But God's got a lot of good in store for his people. . . . We need to ask what he wants us to do. If we truly ask, he'll show us."

Over years of serving, in city council, United Way, Rotary, Bibles for Missions and several other church ministries, Herman can trace a pattern of faithfulness in all that God has done in his life. "It's been a rich life. I don't know how many years are left — but it's been a rich life . . . richer than I ever thought it would be."

Anita Brinkman is a part-time tutor and freelance writer from Chatham, Ontario. With this series, she hopes to demonstrate that every life has stories worth preserving and sharing.



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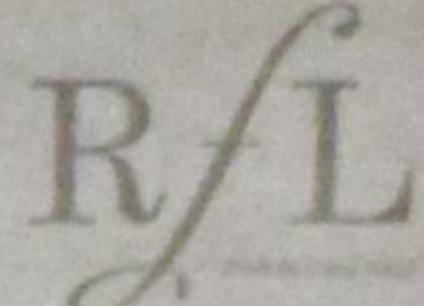
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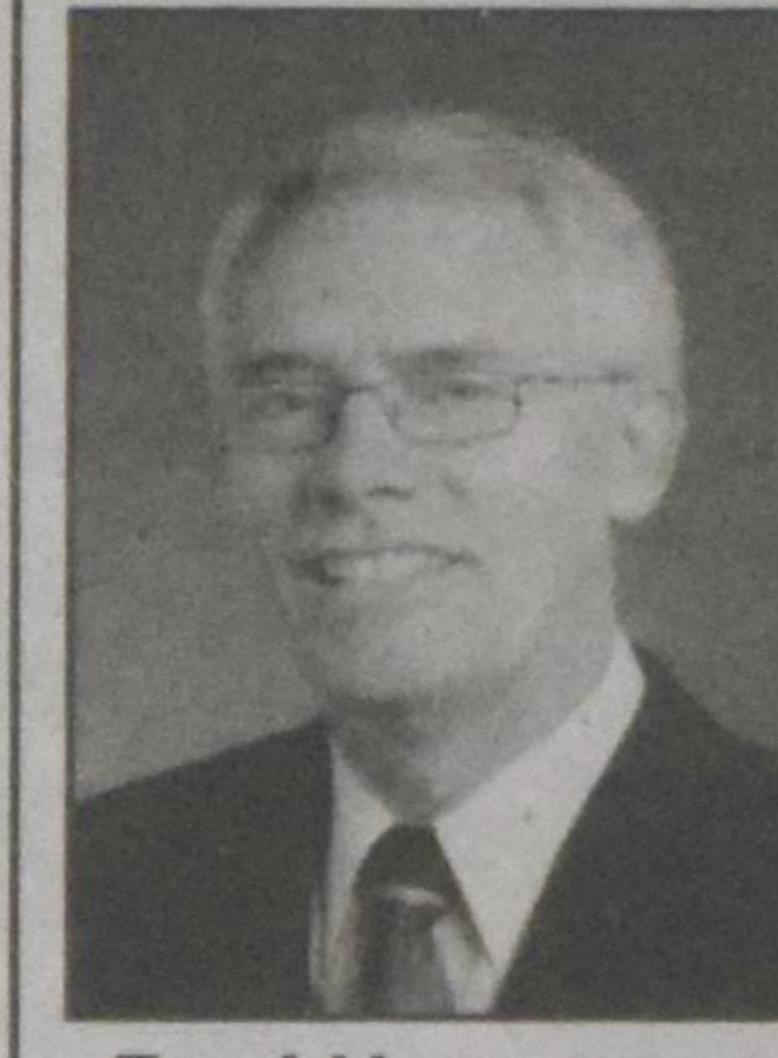
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Nov 23 Handel's Messiah, Georgetown Bach Chorale St Elias Ukrainian Church, Brampton 8 pm. See ad Nov 12 issue.

Nov 23 Handel's Messiah, Georgetown Bach Chorale St Elias Ukrainian Church, Brampton 3 pm. See ad Nov 12 issue.

Dec 2 Annual Dutch Christmas Carol Service at Emmanuel Reformed Church, 170 Clarke St. Woodstock. Service starts at 3 p.m. Meditation by Mr. Ralph Koops. Babysitting provided. Fellowship and refreshments following the service

Dec 8 Musica Sacra Chorus, Arise Shine for thy Light has Come, 8 p.m. Hope CRC, Brantford, Ont. See ad next issue.

Dec. 9 - Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Henry DeBolster will be preaching. DVDs are available.

Dec 22 Musica Sacra Chorus, Arise Shine for thy Light has Come, 8 p.m. Church of the Epiphany, 560 Dundas St., Woodstock, Ont.

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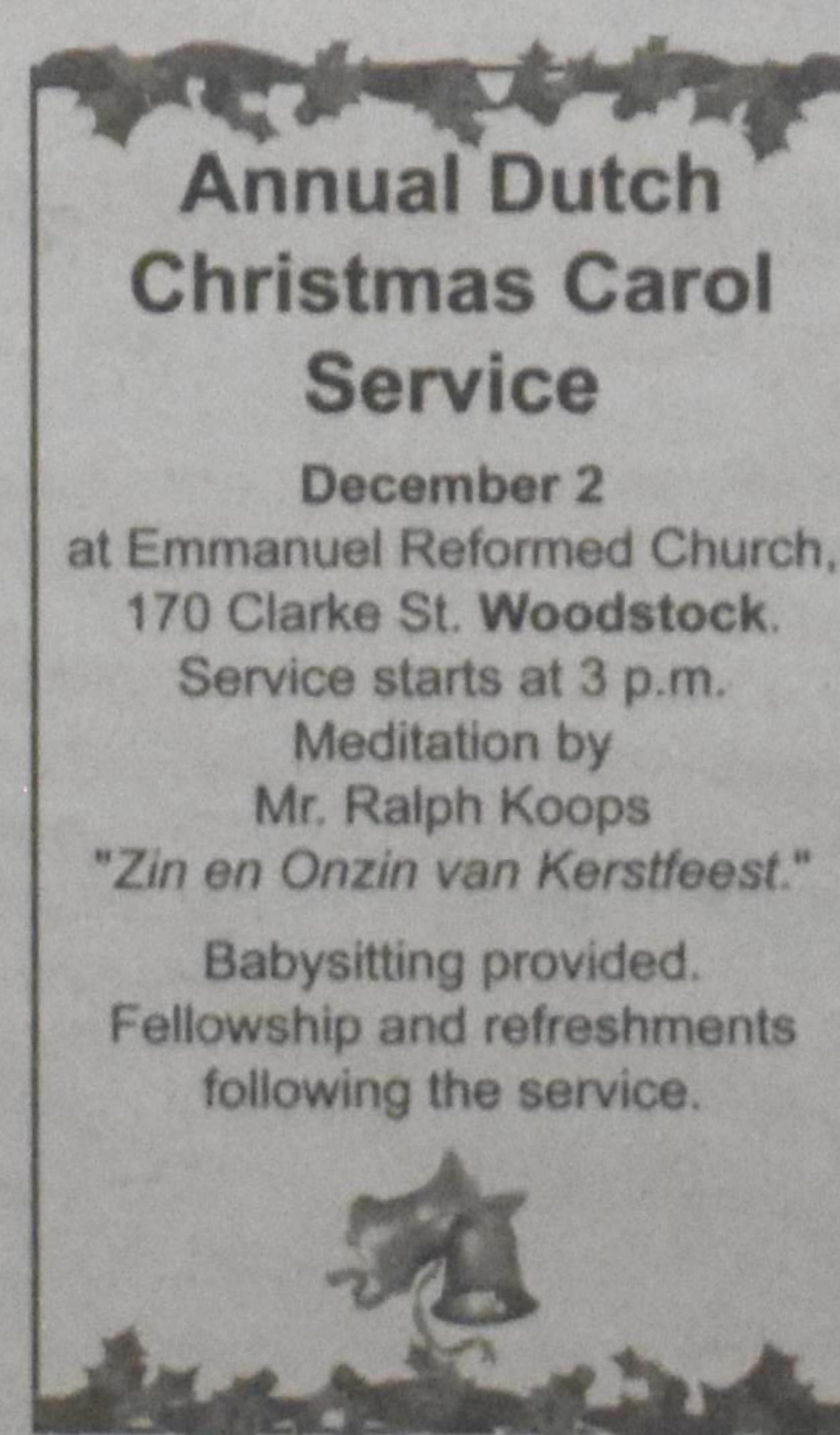
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News

Book on biblical womanhood sparks controversy

Angela Reitsma Bick

"Just a small-town writer asking big questions about faith, doubt, culture, gender and the Church," Rachel Held Evans describes herself. Despite that self-deprecating intro, she's an evangelical, feminist Christian making cultural waves, which is no small feat. In the past month, the Alabama native has been interviewed by CBC radio, the *Today Show*, and *The View*; she's been featured in *The Atlantic*, *The Guardian*, *Slate* online and *People* magazine. *Christian Courier* readers were alerted to this up-and-coming author already last year in the Sept. 26th and Dec. 26th issues, ahead of the trend.

The recent publicity comes from her new book, out Oct. 30 – *A Year of Biblical Womanhood: How a Liberated Woman Found Herself Sitting on Her Roof, Covering Her Head, and Calling her Husband "Master."* She was inspired by a similar 2008 experiment by A.J. Jacobs (*A Year of Living Biblically*). Unlike Jacobs, Evans is a committed Christian. She is wrestling with a real issue that has



This was one of several surprisingly high-profile interviews for a Christian author.

bothered her for years: what does God truly expect of women? In 2010, she decided to find out.

For 12 months she read the Bible as a guide, following one aspect of biblical womanhood each month (gentleness, obedience, domesticity, modesty, purity...). This led to making her own clothes, covering her head, praising her husband in public and even removing herself to a tent on the front lawn during her period. She deliberately kept the tone of her book light-hearted.

Evans says that her goal is "to playfully challenge the idea that any of us are actually practising biblical womanhood all the way. [This will] hopefully liberate women from the fear that they're falling short [of that ideal]." She wants to highlight the fact that no one can agree on what 'biblical womanhood' means, and hopes her book can start important conversations on that definition. "I love the Bible, and I hate seeing it reduced to an adjective."

Dialogue or agenda?

Critics have said that Evans' book makes "a mockery of the Bible," even though Evans insists her actions poke fun at herself and at our interpretations of the Bible; not at the Bible itself. In a review published at *TheGospelCoalition.org*, Kathy Keller writes: "Rachel, I can and do agree with much of what you say in your book regarding the ways in which either poor biblical interpretation or patriarchal customs have sinfully oppressed women. However, you have become what you claim to despise; you have imposed your own agenda on Scripture in order to advance your own goals." Another reviewer describes Evans' book as "heavy on the stunts and light on thoughtful wrestling with Scripture."

Despite the controversy, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood* and its author have a loyal fan base. She's been described as smart, funny and gutsy; her book fair and balanced, "eye-opening" and a "magnificent achievement." Rachel Held Evans "is my kind of woman, Christian, and writer," fellow blogger Glennon Doyle Melton writes. "She cares too much about the Bible to read what it says without wrestling with what it means. Rachel's new book is full of humor, humility, and truth."

As soon as the year was up, Evans cut her hair. Has the experiment had any lasting effect? "The stuff that I wanted to keep after the year," Evans told the *Today Show*, "was anything that helped me love Jesus more, that helped me love my neighbours better." In her CBC interview, she says, "I was always afraid of what the Bible said about women, but now that I've confronted the idea of biblical womanhood, I think my faith is stronger. I know more about what it means to be a woman of faith."

Angela Reitsma Bick is editor of Christian Courier. She resides in Barrie, Ont.



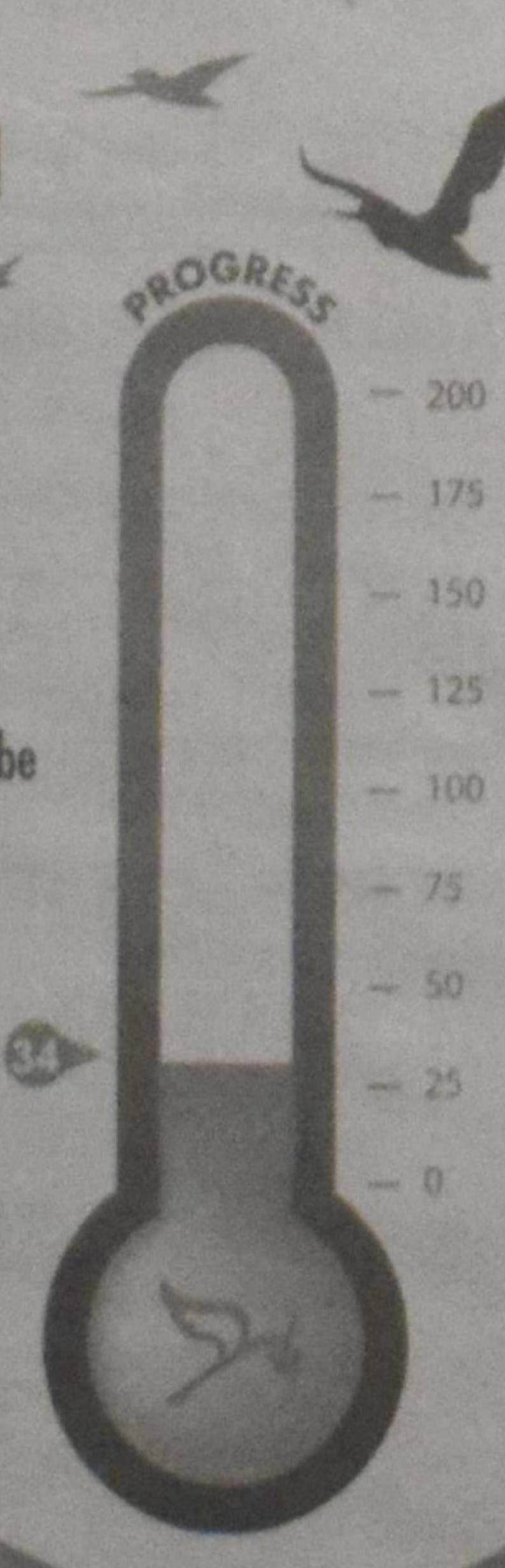
Evans took the Bible as literally as she could for one year.

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Odds and Trends

Pardon me?

In late October, the Dalai Lama gave a speech at Brown University on Rhode Island, shocking the audience when he ended with a profanity. That's what the stenographer typed in closed captioning, at least. A person transcribing the Dalai Lama's speech thought he said that if there's "not much interest" in sharing his message of peace with others, then "#%& it." The exiled Tibetan leader, who actually said "forget it," was misunderstood because of his strong accent, according to a university spokesperson. Now it remains to be seen which of his own famous sayings the Dalai Lama will follow: "When you realize you've made a mistake, take immediate steps to correct it," or "Silence is sometimes the best answer."

Happy holidays??

Today, Nov. 26, is National Shopping Reminder Day. But who could forget that Christmas is a month away, when it's featured on every TV commercial and Tim Hortons' cup? November has some strange holidays.

Nov. 1: Plan Your Epitaph Day. Hallmark recommends writing an epitaph that is "short, to the point and witty, like your very last Tweet." A holiday for control freaks?

Nov. 15: Clean Out Your Refrigerator Day. Blue fur, green slime... this one is a no-brainer. But is an annual event the solution? Rumour has it that Whirlpool Appliances set this day up to make sure there's room in every fridge for extra food before Christmas.

Nov. 22: Start Your Own Country Day. Historically, this has really only worked for a few people. But after you conquer the fridge, why not reward yourself with your own country?

Nov. 28: Make Your Own Head Day. Tired of seeing the same old mug in the mirror every morning? Get out the paper maché and get creative. You never know when an extra head might come in handy (especially if you were successful at the whole country-starting thing).

Is it time yet?

On Dec. 1, the advent calendars go up. I saw a LEGO Star Wars version the other day. It doesn't have much in common with the origins of the tradition, which date back to the 1800s. The first record of a calendar using little pictures was hand-made in 1851 by German Lutherans, and mass produced 50 years later. Gerhard Lang introduced a calendar with 24 little doors in 1910.



The focus of many advent calendars has changed. Traditional ones emphasize the Nativity, each day highlighting a picture, verse or poem from the events leading up to Jesus's birth. Most modern calendars cut Christ out completely – more like seasonal countdown clocks. But it's not hard to find, or make, Christian advent calendars that recall the originals. A good advent calendar makes patience part of the daily routine: like Abraham, Joseph and Job, we join the "is-it-time-yet?" waiting that Simeon and Anna perfected. We are between the two footsteps of Jesus in this world. During Advent, we remember his first visit (birth, death and resurrection) and cry out for his return: Is it time yet? During Advent, we pray and sing with John in Rev. 22:20: "Come quickly, Lord Jesus." And he responds: "Behold, I am coming soon." Amen.

—Angela Reitsma Bick